LOVE — AND HELEN

by SELWYN JEPSON

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BY
SELWYN JEPSON
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NEW YORK
G. HOWARD WATT
1819 BROADWAY
1928

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Printed in the United States of America

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CHAPTER I

ENNUI

"Sorry!" said a straphanger briefly, and removed his foot from Helen's toe.

She acknowledged the apology and tried without much success to read her book between the evening papers of the two stout City men who sat on either side of her.

The Tube train, as usual at this hour of the evening, was full. It had been full when it reached Holborn, where she got into it, and it would remain full until it came to its destination at Hammersmith. To-night she was grateful for a seat, which she did not often succeed in getting, and, since she was in a state of mind where small mercies were things to be welcomed, she pretended that the evening papers of her neighbors and the swaying of the train did not interfere with her enjoyment of Mark Arden's new novel. She relaxed as best she could in her wedged-in position, and tucked her feet farther under the seat.

Helen adored Mark Arden's books. He had a faculty for taking her out of herself and for displaying,

seemingly for her especial benefit, the romantic world of which he wrote. She could forget the stupid weariness of these hours after the day's work with Mr. Black; she could see the cypresses and the moonlight of the Italy their author had written so many novels to immortalize. There were times when she almost believed that Mr. Black and his wholesale carpet business were no more than unpleasant dreams—it was never more than almost, however. If they were dreams indeed, they were of a nature a trifle too real for her to regard them as such. Mr. Black and his horrible carpets made possible that independence of her home which enabled her to order her own life as she wished. They signified fifty-five shillings a week every week of the year; and that meant enough money to pay her board at her father's house in Bedford Park, to buy a season ticket every three months, to purchase a slender meal at Lyons' midday five days a week, and even to indulge occasionally in a new frock—or, more accurately, the material for one, since she made her own clothes. She enjoyed the fun of making them, but it was generally spoilt later on when she realized that however much she labored at a dress it always had a home-made look about it when she came to wear it. But she could not help it. What money she might have spent in dress-shops she had religiously put aside against the day when she was to marry John Foster. In two years she had added forty-

five pounds to the nest-egg of the hundred and fifty pounds left her by her grandmother.

She was always proud of this feat of saving. It showed her that she must love John very much indeed, since the days were well-nigh uncountable when she would have liked to let herself go at lunch in the direction of roast beef and Yorkshire, but had gallantly withheld her hand—and her purse—in favor of Welsh rabbit. The result, however, was pleasing. She had a hundred and ninety-five pounds in the bank. It would buy all the linen and silver for the home, and perhaps a little furniture.

She gave up attempting to read *A Garden in Italy* when a particularly bulky straphanger interposed himself between the page and the electric bulb that had illumined it. She sighed. This was a rotten kind of life! She was tired and she was footsore. She had helped the stock-room clerk to hunt out a missing roll of Axminster powder blue, and it had taken the best part of the afternoon. Her nostrils tickled uncomfortably with the smell of carpet that lingered in them.

She would be glad when she was out of it. She began thinking about John, whom she would see to-night, because it was Friday. She liked Fridays better than most other days. You got paid on Fridays and saw John in the evening—and to-morrow was only a half a day's work, with all the week-end in front of you, when you could forget the office and Mr. Black's

round, cheery countenance. (But oh, how cheery! It would not have been half so bad if he would only look solemn occasionally!) She dismissed him from her thoughts with some haste.

John. John was a bit of a problem, and there was no getting away from it. He had been a problem for two years now, and it had been entirely due to him that she had decided to give up suburban idleness for suburban going-to-business-by-the-nine-five, like so many of her acquaintances. The parent birds, as she always called her father and mother, had not taken at all kindly to John. They refused, unamiably, to see any of his better points, and stuck firmly to their view that their Helen was too good for a thirty-year-old civil engineer who was out of a job. They asked pertinently why, if he was so clever and reliable and sound and charming, hadn't he by this time started in some firm of engineers where the prospects were good?

He had had bad luck.

Well, said the parent birds, bad luck or good luck, we don't approve, and never will. He cannot expect you to wait for him. You take our advice and help the new curate with the church bazaar.

She had not helped the curate with the bazaar. He was a miserable specimen. She had, instead, promised John to wait until he had sufficient money and position to make matrimony as comfortable as could be reasonably expected in these days, and had forthwith flung

herself into Pitman's, where she acquired the necessities of shorthand-typing. The parent birds continued to disapprove, and when she took the job with Mr. Black they were furious.

"A girl in these days," Helen had replied, "isn't quite the same sort of creature she was twenty years ago. I am not content to sit at home doing nothing while you good people choose a husband for me—out of a crowd of men that is conspicuous by its absence. I'm not a beauty, and I'm certainly not what they call 'a prize.' I shall be very happy if I get John, and until that moment I prefer to be independent, since I am following my own line and not yours. It's more honest, if you see what I mean."

Of course, they had not seen what she meant. They had only seen that she was being obstinate and self-willed in her usual way.

Almost immediately on their becoming engaged John had got into an office where he might do quite well in time, and for two years she had got along tolerably well on this mutual arrangement of hope and expectation, but of late there had been a change in herself which she did not understand, and which she put down to the effect of growing up. She was twenty-two now, and was faced with the realization that nothing very much had happened to her since the day she had put up her hair. And the more she thought about this, the more restless it made her. Two years ago, when she had met

John at a dance at the Bedford Park Club, she had been in the mood where she desired to take up Life, with a very capital L, in both hands and get from it what she could, and John had suggested adventure, excitement—in fact, romance. It had been very wonderful. He had kissed her in the little square garden at the back of the Club, and told her that there was nobody like her in the world.

There had been younger men, boys of her own age, who had kissed her and said much the same sort of thing, and she had got a certain amount of thrill out of it; but John had been different. For one thing he was older and more experienced. He knew about the world beyond the boundaries of Bedford Park and Chiswick. He had travelled a bit, and fought in France during the War. He was extraordinarily big and strong both in body and character. When he said a thing he meant it, and, because on the whole he did not say very much, he gave you the feeling of being rather wise. After the younger men he was a distinct relief.

She had fallen in love with him quite effortlessly. He had demanded very little from her. He had kissed her and said nice things to her in a courtly fashion for two years, and it had all been very satisfactory . . . until just lately. And now she felt that there was something wrong somewhere—not with him, but with herself.

She shifted in her seat a little because her foot had gone to sleep in its cramped position, and took a firm

hold on herself. This restlessness was ridiculous. A month more of it, and she would not know how to cope with it. And she was a girl who liked to feel she could cope with things.

Hammersmith. Here she had to change to the District for Turnham Green, the station for Bedford Park. She tucked *A Garden in Italy* under her arm, and allowed the surging crowd to carry her with it on to the platform. She mounted the stairs to cross the line to the west-bound District trains, conscious for a moment of her kinship with all these men and women whom she did not know, but with whom she had one fact of existence in common—this morning and evening journey in the cause of bread-and-butter.

She saw herself keeping house for John in a lesser suburb, losing her youth and her independence of mind in the polite drudgery of being the wife of a comparatively insignificant civil engineer, her whole existence dedicated to little necessary tasks—all of them to be repeated over and over again, year in and year out. Of course, John might become great enough to look after the building of bridges and cathedrals and things, or to superintend the erection of a dam across the Nile. But he would never do more than superintend. He would never *design* the cathedral, or dream the dam until it materialized.

She laughed suddenly, and a little bitterly. She had no earthly business to think in such a pessimistic way.

Turnham Green! Within ten minutes she would be home. She breathed a sigh of relief. It was one of the best moments of the day.

Once outside the station she left the scurry and turmoil of crowded humanity, and walked to the house in Priory Road through the September dusk. The many trees which characterize Bedford Park, and to a large extent destroy its suburbanism, made the evening fragrant; the weather was warm, and the first tinges of autumn were scarcely yet perceptible.

Helen took off her hat and let the air play with her brow.

The Palmers' home stood in semi-detached state, seven feet from the oak palings of the road, and was covered from roof to ground with ivy. In the small front garden which occupied the seven-foot strip grew eight ferns and an almond-tree. It was not a large house—four good-sized bedrooms, a small one, and two sitting-rooms.

Helen opened the front door, and immediately came face to face with her father. She knew at once that there was something the matter, for he had jumped out of the front room, which was used as a general sitting-room, on hearing her key. He said abruptly:

"Come in here, Helen. I want to talk to you!"

She hung her hat on a peg and said:

"Coming, father, but I'd like a wash first, unless you're in a hurry."

But he held open the sitting-room door. Helen, weary again with the thought that this looked like another row, went in, and stood by the table. Mr. Palmer took up a strategic position on the hearthrug, the Englishman's real castle.

"That man rang up to say that he would be busy at the office this evening, and would you make it half an hour later than arranged!" he said, and looked at her under his bushy eyebrows. He was a small, round-faced man, with little hair above a fringe that was thick only as high as his ears. He had retired from the Civil Service ten years ago with an unpretentious pension and an air of extreme disappointment with life.

"That man," of course, was the unfortunate John. He had rung up several times lately, and she had been meaning to advise him not to, since inevitably there was friction with her father in consequence. She never liked stressing the parent birds' antagonism to their friendship, because the poor boy had enough to worry about already.

"Well," she said, "I'm sure he was polite to you."

"Polite!" repeated her father scornfully. "I don't want him to be polite to me! I had been hoping you had made an end of this foolish infatuation! It seems, however, that you are still at his beck and call! Can't you see how stupid all this is? This waiting and waiting for a poky, second-rate marriage?"

"We've been over this before," she said wearily.

"I made up my mind two years ago, and it remains made up. Nothing anybody can say will make any difference to that!"

"Where are you meeting him?" he demanded.

She did not answer. It would only make matters worse to have to say, "At his flat."

He looked at her angrily, rubbing his chin and muttering. He knew that he could never get any further than this point. Her mulish obstinacy met him, and he could do nothing with it. She was right when she said that they had covered this ground before. They had, often enough. It was incredible that she should have stuck to her guns for two years—incredible! He even admired her staunchness sometimes, when he was not faced with some definite and concrete evidence of the tragedy's existence. For, quite honestly, he regarded it as a tragedy, and he was wont to refer to it to her mother as the crowning disappointment of his life.

Why couldn't she be reasonable? It was all very well for her to ask, in that tacit way of hers, what earthly objections he could have to John Foster. At worst, looking at the fellow superficially, he was merely unsuccessful: a state of affairs that time might well be expected to remedy. He could scarcely define his objections, and that was the truth of it.

Helen, on the other hand, could define them easily. She knew that the whole trouble lay in the fact that

she had picked out John herself, in spite of her father being one of those men who like to think that the householdship, of which he was the captain, was entirely under his guidance and jurisdiction: dependent upon him for wisdom and decision no less than for bread-and-butter. And she was a kind of mutineer in the very heart of it. She had ceased to look to him for anything—even the bread-and-butter. It hinted at ingratitude perhaps, and he had often accused her of that failing, but, although she had never put the idea into words, she could not help feeling that to be his daughter had been no choice of hers, and, further, that in no species of life did Nature demand that the offspring should remain for ever in the parental nest. Indeed, it had been due solely to consideration for a genuine and mutual affection that she had continued to live at home after she had found she could stand on her own feet outside it. She was fond of her father, and her mother aroused all her sympathy and desire to protect.

And now these difficulties all over again. She sank down in a chair and put her hand to her eyes.

"I wish to God," Mr. Palmer exploded suddenly, stamping his feet, "that you'd never gone in for that confounded typing business!"

She could have answered that by observing that she knew exactly why the "typing business" had enabled her to purchase for the sum of one pound a week a measure of independence. She had worked pretty hard

for that same independence, and these recurring threats against it hurt and angered her. It was not fair!

"At all events," he went on, "I should take it as a favor if you would remain in to dinner to-night."

"But, father, I can't!"

"You can. You know you can. I want you to stay at home because Gerald Harvey is dining here, and he said he hoped he would be able to see something of you. Be reasonable, girl!" He had seen the look of irritation on her face.

"I'm to meet John at eight," she said. "It was to have been seven-thirty. He will be expecting me."

"He is still at the office. You can quite well ring him up and say you must stay at home. I insist on it!"

"I don't want to see Gerald Harvey! I don't like him, and I don't want to like him!"

"Why not? He's an important man—knows everybody—one of the nicest people we know."

He meant, really, that he was quite the richest.

"I dare say he does know 'everybody,' and he may be very nice. I suppose he is. But we've known him for years and years. Why should I stay at home this one particular night? He will come again, won't he?"

"That's beside the point. I am *asking* you to stay at home. If you have the faintest respect for me as your father, or even a little affection such as a daughter is expected to show, you will do as I ask."

"That's not fair!" she exclaimed unhappily. "You know I'm fond of you, and that these differences worry and make me miserable. I've promised to meet John, and I have been looking forward to it all day!"

"Pff! You talk about being fond of me, and in the same breath propose to do something that you know will displease me! Look here, Helen! I'm your father, and you owe me the obedience of a daughter. I order you to stay at home to-night, and I *forbid* you to meet Foster! D'you hear that? Then that's enough!"

"Enough!" she cried out. "It's more than enough! You have no right to forbid me! I am independent! I pay my way, and I will go it as I see fit! There! You've driven me on to saying a thing I've always sworn I never would say; but it's true, and *you* know it's true!"

He stood without a word, unable to believe his ears. Instantly she was sorry. She understood so well that beneath it all he was thinking of her good, however selfishly he seemed to wish to enforce it, however mistaken he might be in what he considered good for her. She stood up, and moved toward him to put her arms round him.

But the hardness in his eyes stopped her. Looking back on that moment months later, Helen realized that it was the turning-point in her career. She saw it in retrospect as one of those very little things which can make, in the law of cause and effect, a stupendous

difference. If the light had been shining on her father's face from another angle, an angle that rendered invisible that expression in his eyes, she would have kissed him and begged him to try and understand how she felt about John, about everything. And he, because he loved her, would have relented.

As things were, however, she allowed her arms to lie against her sides, and waited till he spoke.

He said, between tight lips:

"I do not understand you, Helen. It is difficult to believe that you are my daughter. We will leave it at this: I have forbidden you to see Foster to-night. If you do so it will be against my wishes."

He spoke quietly, but she knew that he was terribly angry—more angry than she had ever seen him. Her heart ached, and yet supreme resentment lay in every thought, a dominant emotion. She looked away, her head high.

"I am sorry, father! I suppose we do not see things in the same way and never will. You will not realize that I have my own life to live, and I cannot see your point of view. I am not a child. I know what I'm about. I have made my arrangements for this evening, and I intend to stick to them."

She moved toward the door, and felt him watching her. He did not seem to be her father at all. She could not visualize him as such, but rather as a little man whose real feelings were always suppressed and

unuttered because long years of doing other people's work had stultified his own personality. He had neither initiative nor originality. Mark Arden had said in one of his books that to express thought and emotion effectively a definite sense of individuality was required.

At the door she said contritely:

"I didn't mean what I said about Mr. Harvey. He is very kind, and has been very kind to us. Tell him, will you, that I'll drop in after the office to-morrow morning—about one? And—and I'm very sorry to miss him to-night."

What she had wanted to say was that she was very sorry to have hurt the so discomfitted parent bird, but that one had turned his back on her and was staring down into the empty fireplace. His hands were clasped behind him, and his whole attitude expressed—better than any words he could use—his seething dissatisfaction with his only daughter.

She closed the door gently after her. There was a little lump in her throat, and she coughed and swallowed at it. There were voices in the dining-room—her young brother Will and her mother. She did not want to face them at the moment, and her desire for tea had left her. Her mouth was dry. She started up the stairs to her room, but her mother heard her and came into the hall.

"Hullo, mums. I shall be down in a minute. Keep a cup of tea for me."

"Has your father spoken to you, Helen?"

"He has."

"I felt—I mean—I thought I did right to tell him about the telephone message, dear." She was a little doubtful and hesitant.

So that was it! Her mother had answered the 'phone, and had gone at once to her father. And he, in order to shield the informer, had given the impression that John had spoken to *him.*

Helen wanted to laugh. It was funny, when you looked at the thing. All the time her father had been railing at her he had secretly respected her feelings, her sense of sportsmanship, for he knew that she would hate to think that her mother had sneaked on her. He was a dear, however impossible in his old-fashionedness and obstinacy. She looked down at her mother, at her greyish hair, and smooth, untroubled face—a face that always puzzled you, because it never expressed the temperamental unhappiness that lay behind it.

"Yes," said Helen. "John wanted me to see him later than arranged."

"But you are not going out? Surely your father . . . and then there is Mr. Harvey coming, who specially——"

She saw the set of Helen's lips, and stopped suddenly, clenched her hands, and went back to the dining-room without further comment.

Helen sighed and mounted the stairs. Long ago she

had diagnosed the reason for her mother's opposition to John; it came from a mixture of jealousy and avariciousness. She was jealous of anybody who occupied her daughter's time and attention, and desired to keep her at home until such a moment as the right man materialized—who must be rich. As long as she could remember there had always been that idea in the air. She must marry a rich man.

She entered her room and closed the door, standing for a moment in thought. She pulled off her hat and dropped it on a chair. How tired she was! She hated this room to-night and its futile attempt to be the bedchamber of a great lady. The white-enamelled furniture was too obviously home-painted, and the shape of the room, which was long and narrow, made everything jostle together on one side of it. The wardrobe squeezed itself on top of the dressing-table—of which the mirror was never at the proper angle—and the bed, of a different design from the rest, had to be where it interfered with your getting in and out of the door. It was covered with a pink silk coverlet.

Helen went to the wardrobe, but hesitated with her fingers on the handle. She had got to change into her black satin, but she felt that for a moment she could not face those clothes. They shrieked their meanness at her, crying out that they were old—old—and that she had worn them all more times than she could count.

She sat down at the dressing-table, and, putting her

hands to her face, gazed at its reflection in the mirror. She was in one of those moods, which seemed to come upon her more and more often, when she could see nothing about her that was in any way attractive. She knew, of course, that she was not pretty. She knew, however, that her features were what you called 'regular,' but she could not persuade herself that they were anything but ordinary. Her eyes—well—they were good, even if you could not decide what their color was. In some lights they were quite golden, but more often a kind of greyish brown—'muddy,' she sometimes thought. They were, perhaps, the most striking feature of her face. Her nose, again, was about the right shape and size for the symmetry of the rest, and her skin of an average clearness and texture, but which she felt would improve if she could afford skin-foods and the time to use them properly. Her lips pleased her. Even this evening she could not help admitting, in her analytical frame of mind, that they were good lips. They curved delightfully, they were red, and they were soft. "Kissable," a man had once announced to be their character, and she had always remembered him with gratitude. He had obviously meant it, and he was manifestly experienced.

"But what use are they?" she asked herself aloud—and thought of John. They were John's to kiss, not hers to question as to their value.

She brushed out her lately shingled hair.

"The trouble," she went on, unconsciously watching her mouth's movements, "is that I'm the sort of a girl who would look a hundred per cent more beautiful if she had the clothes. If you had the clothes, Helen, my dear! Clothes and the time to wear them, and the right place to wear them in! Oh, bother it all! What does it matter?"

She paused, and began to change her frock. She slipped the so-serviceable-and-sensible workaday dress over her head and let it fall on the floor. It lay there, brown and shapeless, an emblem of her servitude to the cause of bread-and-butter, and she put out her tongue at it.

"But it does matter!" she added, almost with violence, and took the black satin from its hanger.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST CUP

At 8.30 she climbed the stairs of a house in a back street off Russell Square and knocked at a door on the first floor—John's microscopic two-room flat.

"Come in," she heard him call, and, turning the handle, she stepped into the home of the man she was going to marry.

"Hullo!" he said, and looked up from the gas-ring, on which he was making cocoa.

Helen saw that his round face was flushed, but more particularly she noticed that he made no effort to kiss her. Of course, the cocoa was in the final stage of its creation, and it was selfish of her to criticize her welcome.

She took off her coat and hat and put them on a chair, together with Mark Arden's novel, which she had read in the train. The table had been laid for their supper in John's peculiarly exact way.

"So you got my message," he said. "You might cut some bread-and-butter."

"I got the message, and so did father and mums." She attacked the loaf.

"Does that mean there was a row?"

"It does. But don't worry about it, John, please. I'm really so used to rows that I don't notice them very much."

She liked to think she didn't. In actual fact, when she was honest with herself, she realized that the emotional strain of trying to let down the parent birds lightly was considerable. She hated to hurt people. Sensitive herself, she knew what it was. Why, she asked herself, buttering a slice of bread, were human beings always hurting each other, even those whom they really did not want to hurt? In such small things . . . it hurt her that John had not as yet shown any desire to kiss her.

"It's all very well," he began, straightening his broad back and coming to the table, saucepan in hand, "but they've had two years to get used to our being engaged. God! I wish we could get the thing over!"

She thought it an odd way to talk of marriage, but she understood his feelings. He was not good at expressing his ideas, although he thought very clearly, in accordance with his direct type of mind. His outburst showed a certain strength, and it was this that was always attractive to her. He stood on his own two feet, and, but for ill-luck, he would have been far more successful in his career.

"What did they row about particularly?"

"Oh, nothing. There was a man coming to dinner they wanted me to see."

He poured the cocoa into the cups, and put the saucepan on the hearth.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" she asked him. "I'm tired and miserable, and I want to be made a fuss of."

"Poor kid!" It was his one phrase of pity for her.

He caught her to him, and she returned his kisses hungrily, for it was good to be close to him, in his arms, after the weariness of the day and the ordeal of the scene at home.

She whispered a question.

"Next autumn as ever is," he assured her.

"It's a long time. . . ."

"Hm. But I must feel secure—financially—before we take the plunge. You do understand that?"

"I suppose so. But you know, John, the months go on, and I'm so frightened of getting old—before——"

"What?"

"Oh, before I can give myself to you, before I can live properly—as I am made to live—and love as I know I can love——"

He looked at her doubtfully. He seemed a little out of his depth, and to hide it he kissed her again.

After a pause she said:

"I can understand why so many, many girls in these days, when nobody seems to have any money, don't mind living with the man they love before marriage, or even when they know marriage is impossible."

"Helen!"

"Is that such a terrible thing to say? I suppose, according to the old standards, it sounds a bit too modern, and obviously you couldn't advance it as a mode of conduct for all girls, could you? I mean the silly ones. But if you are sure you are in love—and——"

"What odd things you say!" he exclaimed. "Marriage is the basis of all social life. The community couldn't exist if it was ignored—done away with——"

"But I would never do away with it! It is a wonderful, precious thing!" She meant it, but still he would never see how she could believe in two such apparently contradictory theories of life.

He looked relieved, and, bent upon changing the subject, asked:

"You did not tell me just what the fuss was about at home. Let's have supper——"

He loosed her—without kissing her again—and they sat down opposite each other at the table.

"Well, I think the real trouble was because I did not show any keenness to see Gerald Harvey."

"Gerald Harvey!"

"Yes. He's very rich and so on, but—well, I wanted to see you. Father was awfully upset because I wouldn't stay, so I placated him a little by saying I would drop in at Mr. Harvey's after the office to-morrow—for lunch, you know."

"Wasn't that rather dishonest?"

"Why, whatever do you mean?" She was always up against his rigid code, forever nervous lest she should offend it.

"That you should promise to do a thing you have no intention of doing."

She put down her cup.

"But I do intend to look him up! I admit I have no real wish to, but it seemed so unkind to father to show no anxiety to please him."

"That's all very well, but you can't go and see Gerald Harvey—visit the man unchaperoned——"

"Why ever not, John? He has known us all for years and years—he's a family friend."

She saw that particular look come into his face, an expression she dreaded.

"I dare say," he replied, "but it's not done."

"Oh, John! Don't be ridiculous! You know there's no earthly harm in it!"

He was silent for a moment, dissecting a sardine in his deliberate way.

"I see a lot of harm in it," he remarked. "If you stop to think a little you'll see what I mean."

It was not the first time that he had accused her of impulse and lack of forethought, and it hurt her. She knew that when it came down to bed-rock she was really more intelligent than he, practically and theoretically. In all matters of importance and decision it was her brain that reached the final conclusion—first,

at all events. He got there eventually, but by a more laborious road.

"Well, I *don't* see harm in it," she returned flatly. "I've told father that I would go—and I must and will."

He looked at her stonily. He could not understand that her sharpness of tone was to hide the mortification of a sensitive nature.

"You are being unreasonable, Helen. I don't know what has come over you lately. You seem to have such a queer attitude toward things. The way you talked about love and marriage just now. You're not the Helen I fell in love with two years ago."

"I have always felt like that about them! So you've fallen out of love with me then?"

She kept her eyes on her plate, because she would rather have died than let him see the tears in them.

"Don't be silly! You know I haven't!"

"Then you must understand why I should see Gerald Harvey to-morrow at lunch-time. I can come on here quite early, before tea, and we can go to a cinema just the same."

"It isn't that. It's simply that I do not think Gerald Harvey is the sort of man a nice girl should see alone."

Tears or no tears, she had to look up at that.

"What do you mean? He is a perfectly respectable man whom I have known since I was a little girl!"

"You're not a little girl any more. Gerald Harvey has a bad reputation!"

She jumped to her feet.

"How dare you speak like that of my friend!"

"Friend? What does *that* mean?"

"John! You're hateful!"

"I'm not! I'm poor, and Gerald Harvey is rich."

She could not believe her ears.

"You're mad, John."

"Maybe. But I know this world. I know men—like Gerald Harvey. Helen, I'm sorry to talk to you like this. Sit down, my dear, and be reasonable."

What he meant was, "Sit down and don't get excited." She saw it, and it did nothing to lessen her resentment. He was being unjust, and above all things she possessed a sense of justice.

"I won't sit down, John, until you have taken back what you've said! And at least I want you to treat me as a human being, as some one who is quite capable of looking after herself and forming her own opinion."

He smiled tolerantly.

"My dear, it's the man's job—my job—to look after you and form your opinions in matters of this kind."

That smile! Helen could have shrieked at it. It seemed to embody, in all its entirety, the male's fatuous illusion that he was the dominant creature in the universe. Equality with woman? Pouf!

"Oh!" said Helen.

"And for that reason I must forbid you to see Gerald Harvey alone—to-morrow or any other time." His voice was finality itself.

It was the second time that evening a man had said to her, "I forbid."

"If I refuse to be 'forbidden'?" she asked quietly.

He may have seen the blazing anger in her eyes, but the dangerous quality of her coolness was lost on him. He shrugged his shoulders, and remarked:

"You will not refuse. You will see that I am thinking only of your good."

She walked slowly toward the chair on which lay her hat and coat.

"Yes. That is the sorrowful, pathetic part of it, John dear. If you had thought less of my good and more of my sense of fairness it would have been more successful."

"Helen! Where are you going?"

"Home, I suppose."

She slipped on her coat, pulling the collar close under her chin. She felt strangely cold, and yet inexplicably unmoved. Her mind was still, her heart untouched by any strong emotion. The anger and resentment of the previous minutes had given place to a queer passivity. This, she knew, was the last phase, but, instead of feeling crushed and broken in spirit, she realized a vague thankfulness that it had come.

"Helen!" he cried again, frightened, now standing by the door.

She pulled on her little black hat, arranging her hair in front of her ears. She faced him while she was doing it.

"I'm sorry, John, but we could never have managed it, you know."

"What?"

"Getting on with each other. It sounds hackneyed, but you have never understood me, I'm afraid. I'm not the sort of girl who could ever make you happy. I'm not—not sufficiently dependent. I like to think in my own way."

"But you can! I——"

"I intend to, my dear——"

She slipped the small diamond solitaire from her finger and put it gently on the corner of the table. It twinkled up at her from the side of the cup of cocoa she had not finished.

If the cocoa wasn't, her engagement was, she reflected in that silly way you do in serious moments.

She picked up *A Garden in Italy*. John stood aside, making no effort to stop her as she went out of the door. The last she saw of him was the return of that stiff, unbending look in his face. She knew that he was saying to himself:

"One of her moods. She'll think quite differently to-morrow. She'll come back."

But she knew that she would not. She neither expected nor wanted him to take her back.

She saw her way so clearly now, and it was as though a weight had been lifted from her heart. The restlessness of the last weeks had disappeared. She closed the door softly, and went down the stairs. In the street below she filled her lungs with the night air.

"Poor John!" she thought. "Poor John!"

But she was strangely without regret. A phase had come to an end, and therefore a new one was begun. She had not the ghost of a notion what the future would bring forth, and she gloried in one thought. A sense of adventure was upon her.

Life awaited her.

On feet that were a little shaky, for the emotions of the last few minutes had affected her more than she realized, she walked out of Russell Square and turned south down Southampton Row.

It was strange, when she stopped to think of it, how definitely she looked forward to the future at a time when regrets for the past should have been uppermost.

And yet, she told herself, it was purely a matter of chance how long you took to bury the past. You might spend twenty years doing it, or twenty seconds. It was the result that counted.

John, and all that John had meant in hope and promise, was dead—dead—as though he had never

existed—and a dull ache in her heart was all that was left.

"I've been in love with love," she said, half aloud.

And the more she looked at John, now she had dissociated him from herself, the more impossible he—and all that he stood for—became.

"Oh, but it's horrible—horrible!" ran her swift thoughts, and unbidden tears came to blur the street-lamps. "I've hurt him! And I never wanted to do that. But could I help it? I was honest—and I *had* to be! I should have made him dreadfully unhappy, and I—I should have been miserable too."

And after a little the street-lamps became brighter and defined again.

She turned into New Oxford Street, and made her way westward along the almost deserted pavements. Gradually, as her mind became quieter, she took to glancing casually at the shop-windows, which although they were themselves unilluminated, showed their contents in the lights of the street.

It was always her habit to keep an eye on what the shops were selling at the moment, for, although she rarely, if ever, had the money to spend in them, it was nice to know where to go if you wanted a particular thing—when you dreamt of how you would dress if you were rich!

Clothes! Clothes! Clothes! You might jeopardize

your position in your father's home and lose you *fiancé* in one short hour, but clothes remained an ever-present problem.

She thought, "If I'm going to look into this thing called life I *must* have clothes—frocks and shoes, good stockings, and wonderful undies."

Suddenly, in her clear-sighted way, she realized that every successful girl, unless she was successful in business—which seemed a little dull—was successful through men, and that men, without necessarily knowing much about nice clothes, liked them and were impressed by them. It was all very well to say that you dressed because it was every girl's job to make the best of herself, but when you got down to it it was by being dressed well that you stood a better chance of attracting a man's attention.

"But do I want to attract man's attention? I suppose," thought Helen, speculating, "I do."

And she stopped some while at a window, appraising the things in it. There was a rather sweet little opera-cloak in jade green chiffon velvet, with a white fox collar. She could imagine it about her shoulders.

She saw herself alighting from a luxurious limousine, at a theatre perhaps. A tall man in evening dress would be with her—attentive, his eyes full of her. His face was indistinct—he was pleasant, friendly, even adoring—and his mere presence made the evening complete.

The green cloak——

Helen came back to earth with a bump, half amused at the way things came into her mind suddenly in these days, but realizing with a mounting thrill of excitement that she had very nearly two hundred pounds in the bank. Two hundred pounds that were *not* going to be spent on linen and silver for John Foster's home!

Helen looked at the opera-cloak with quite a new expression, her heart beating a little faster.

Why, if she wanted it she could buy it! And there was no one in the world, nor yet any circumstance, that stood between her and her ability to buy it if she wanted it. She had the money!

She looked at it carefully. Well, perhaps—but then there were hundreds of other opera-cloaks in London, and among them she might easily find one she liked better.

She turned away from it and walked on, her soul afire with the pleasure of anticipation. Henceforth she looked at the shop-windows from quite a different point of view, no longer that of one who dreams, but of one who grasps reality in a firm hand.

As she walked she began to think about the future more deliberately than hitherto. She wanted, above all things, a good time. She wanted to dance, to talk to amusing people, to move in a world of light and laughter, color and romance. She wanted to love and be loved, to find a man who could give her the full sympathy of understanding, who recognized that she was a

living, intelligent being. He would not be another John; indeed, he would be all that poor John was not. He would love her fiercely, passionately, and yet he would be very, very kind—the perfect, gentle knight of all her forgotten dreams.

She remembered, suddenly, that before John came she had often and often imagined the man she would ultimately love, and, in thinking that John was he, she had lost sight of the fact that he was different from what she had hoped.

"I wanted him so much," she whispered, "so much that the moment a man loved me I told myself that I had found what I wanted. I suppose I was very young, but I think I know better now."

Her heart beat faster, and little cold thrills ran up and down her back. A sense of exultation seized her, and she clenched her hands, throwing back her head.

Thus she moved, almost as though on air, with a sense of vast power holding her, and a vision of great joy stood at the end of the unknown road she was to travel.

Adventure beckoned, and the magic call of romance rang in her ears.

She scarcely realized where her feet were taking her, so enwrapped was she. There were few pedestrians to divert her attention, for it was the quiet hour that comes upon London just before the theatre crowds pour into the streets. Oxford Circus was an arena where empty

roads joined, flanked by the great buildings of the new architecture which was changing the face of London.

She turned down Regent Street toward Piccadilly, that romantic centre of the world she desired so much to know.

Liberty's arrested her attention, and she stood for several minutes gazing at the gorgeous colors therein displayed. The glimmer of soft silks and satins and the dull sheen of golden cloth caught her heart. A frock in that peacock blue—a sheath of a frock—built itself up in her mind's eye. She would cut the office to-morrow morning, and come to these shops and explore them to her full content. What a time she would have! The bank opened at nine; she would draw ten—no, twenty—pounds by way of a beginning, and she would not spend it too quickly. Every second of her shopping must be made a minute, every minute an hour.

She walked on, and came eventually to Piccadilly Circus. The theatres were emptying now, and cars bearing their smart passengers homeward were swirling in the gyratory traffic: long, smooth cars, glimmering with bright nickel. Here and there she caught fleeting glimpses of girls with young, happy faces—girls of her own age, bareheaded, sleek, beautifully dressed. What a lot of people with money there were in the world! She thought of all the great houses: thousands and thousands of them in the fashionable quarters of

town, preserving stately faces, expressing the luxury of their quality, the wealth of their inhabitants. Trade-wars, strikes, and political upheavals came and went, destroying, but the rich were always there somehow.

Her mood of exultation was gradually losing its vigor, leaving her tired, aware that she had passed through a good deal since the day began. She wanted to rest a little before going home.

"I'll find some quiet place—a *café*—there are lots about here—and have something before catching a train. The Tube will be crowded for the next half-hour," she decided.

She went up Great Windmill Street into the darker side-streets of Soho, and came thus to Archer Street and the Café Corona, where you saw stage people, artists and so forth. A pleasant, cheery place. There were several tables occupied when Helen got there. A party of four in the corner were recapitulating and discussing a problem play; two girls who looked like chorus belles were whispering excitedly about some adventure they had had.

Helen chose a small table at the end of the narrow room and ordered an omelet and a white coffee. Heavens, but she was weary!

She began thinking about John again, wondering what he was thinking, doing. Perhaps he had turned in after tidying up. He would wash the cups and saucers, throw away the cocoa she had not finished.

It would take him ages and ages to realize that she was not coming back to him. What would he do when he did realize? Nothing probably. Just do and say nothing, and continue his painstaking, ineffectual, pernickety, prejudiced way through life. Poor John!

A waitress brought the omelet and coffee, and Helen began her meal. She had been too engrossed in thought, or too tired, to notice the tall man who came in with a vivid, sparkling girl, whose smooth, corn-colored hair shone in the electric light. They sat down at the next table, side by side and facing Helen, so that she saw them clearly.

The girl caught and held her attention at once. Perhaps it was her frock, a tight-bodiced, flame-colored satin, which was visible when she threw back her white brocade cloak. A tiny but very expensive-looking diamond watch glittered on her white wrist, and her fingers were adorned with several gorgeous rings. "Dreadfully rich," thought Helen, and noticed the deference of the waiter and the hovering of the proprietor. The girl talked simply, animatedly, and yet with a queer eagerness to her companion. Her face was pretty, delicate of skin, and Helen decided that her arched eyebrows owed their thin severity of line to a pair of tweezers. "Now that's 'catty,'" she told herself, and realized that the face was familiar, although she could not remember where she had seen it before.

She began observing the man, who was in evening dress.

There was something distinctive about him. Tall men were more easily distinctive than short, of course, but in this case the impression was not due to his height, but to his oddly detached air, which suggested that he was thinking always about something else, which, she felt, was never allowed to interfere with the occupation of the moment. He was obviously interested in the fair girl's conversation, and now and again he spoke. When he did she listened, always with the same eagerness. "She's frightfully in love with him," Helen decided, and was aware of a slight envy. He was a peculiarly pleasant-looking man. His face was essentially kind, essentially strong, and yet delicately gentle, for all its attractive lack of what is called 'handsomeness.' Whether, however, he was in love with the girl was quite another matter, and a point on which Helen could not make up her mind. If he was he did not show it; but then he did not look as though he ever showed that kind of thing in public—and rarely in private, she amended. A reserved man, because he was a sensitive man. He looked, quite definitely, as though he were a 'somebody.'

She sighed. More glimpses of a world she wanted so badly to know, and yet to which entry was both difficult to discover and to gain!

She lifted the coffee to her lips and sipped it.

Then something happened. It was such a small thing really when she came to look back on it; something of which no one else in the room was aware; something which happened secretly. . . .

At the same moment as she put the cup to her mouth the man at the next table lifted his and drank. And as he did so Helen met his glance.

They looked into each other's eyes for a moment, a fraction of a second, perhaps. Then he looked away, answering some questions put by his companion.

Helen caught her breath almost audibly with the shock of the sensation which drove its way through her, into the depths of her being. She could no more have explained it, analyzed it, than she could have grown wings and flown. It was utterly inexplicable, utterly devastating. She felt, for a space of several minutes, as though she had been knocked down by a wave in a heavy sea.

She flushed hotly, and bent her head over her plate. Had he noticed? No. He was talking easily and naturally to the girl. His voice was low and deep, the words indistinguishable.

She demanded of herself what had happened to her. Could the mere glance of a man's eyes affect her so? It was ridiculous! There must have been something else in it—some contact with deeper, secret things—neither he nor she realized. What could it mean?

She stole a quick, covert glance in his direction. He

was not looking at her. Seemed unaware even that he had ever set eyes on her. It was as well. Was it, though?

Then she discovered an aching longing in her that he should look at her again, turn his eyes toward her so that she could see them, and perhaps understand the unreadable message in them. "I'm over-tired," she told herself, and knew that she was not—at least, as far as a thing like this went she was not. It was conceivable, even, that the very fact that she was tired had made thinner the veil which hid the realities. Realities!

She could not dismiss the conviction that she had touched something *real.* It seemed such nonsense; but during that short moment she had felt, if she had felt anything at all, that she *belonged* to the man.

In the midst of her consternation—it was little else—she became aware that he was about to leave the *café.* He was paying his bill, and a moment later he stood up. He was taller than she had supposed. She watched him intently, breathlessly, taking in the little details—the straightness of his back, the poise of his fine head, the confident, easy way he went to the door, piloting the girl between the tables. He was going!

Suddenly that seemed a dreadful thing. He was going, and she had not learnt what it all signified—this unaccountable, disturbing influence he had unconsciously exerted over her—this sense of having come close to a mystery which was more important and more wonder-

ful than any experience she had ever known. She clenched her hands.

The frosted glass door swung gently back and forth, and at length came to a standstill. He had gone, and half the new-found joy in life had gone with him. Helen closed her eyes for a moment, and whispered under her breath:

"Love might happen like this—suddenly—in the middle of things——"

And then she knew that that was exactly what had happened. The discovery came easily, and was easily acceptable, which seemed odd somehow. You'd think it had to soak in, slowly, before you could face it comfortably.

She opened her eyes, rubbed her chin with her pink forefinger, and then beckoned to the waitress. "I wonder if you could tell me who that gentleman was—the one who sat there and has just left?"

"Him with Estelle la Rose, miss?"

Helen at once realized why the girl's face had been familiar. Estelle la Rose occupied the highest pinnacle of stage fame. She had seen her in several plays.

"Oh! Estelle la Rose!" said Helen. "Yes. The man with her."

"That's Mr. Fabian Knight—the one who wrote *The Silent Place*—the play she's in now. His first play, they say. Quite young. She and 'im come in here most nights after the show, though I dare say we

won't see 'em again. The piece came off to-night. Four hundred performances it ran."

The waitress was becoming conversational, and Helen asked for her bill. "Fabian Knight." There was a musical ring to it. So he was a 'somebody,' as she had guessed, and a clever 'somebody,' not just a rich or titled one. She had seen *The Silent Place,* and had liked it as being original and out of the ordinary, with a lot of wisdom and a lot of humor in it.

So that was who he was. One who sat on a high mountain in the skies, a million miles beyond her reach: a being in another world. And she, who at the most stood close to the threshold of life, knowing little of it, but determined to have her own way with it, had fallen deeply, desperately in love with him because she had looked into his eyes over the rim of a cheap coffee-cup in a cheap Soho *café.*

She powdered her nose perfunctorily, and went out into the cool night. Time to be getting home. Piccadilly to Turnham Green. Turnham Green!

"Oh, my hat!" she said suddenly, aloud, and then laughed softly. Well, it had happened. Perhaps it was ordained; perhaps it was just silly romantic nonsense. She didn't care.

She'd catch up with him somewhere, somehow, and see if she couldn't make him love her a little bit too.

CHAPTER III

HARVEY

I

It was a long time before Helen slept that night. She lay awake until the dawn filtered through the blue casement-cloth curtains. She fell asleep finally because she could no longer think coherently about anything. Languor stole upon her mind, and just before she dozed off the exultation which had come upon her when she left John's flat for the last time returned to drive away the doubts and misgivings which had been assailing her.

The same sense of invincibility in herself accompanied it. The dream that she would find Fabian Knight and meet him on a footing of equality no longer seemed wildly unreasonable; she *would* do it. Why shouldn't any girl who made up her mind to it, and set her heart and her eyes steadfastly on her ambition?

After all, was she demanding so much? Approaching the problem intelligently, using her wits and her luck, she ought to manage it. She began to make plans, and immediately there came into her thoughts Gerald Harvey, who knew everybody worth knowing. She held the tip of her tongue between her straight, white

teeth, and considered him. He had a bad reputation, John believed. Where had he got the notion? It was all very well to accuse him of having made that statement about Harvey because he was jealous of him—because he thought she might prefer him—but it would be unlike John, who, however hard-pushed, never exaggerated, not only because it offended his moral code, but also because it offended his pigeon-holed mind. It looked as though he had heard of Gerald Harvey in that particular light, and she tried to recall the man more definitely. But it was three years since she had seen him, and three years ago she had not had the clearer, more sapient view of men she had now. She remembered that he had expressed unusual admiration for her, however.

She would lunch with him to-morrow, and if he turned out to be a cad it could not be helped. Actually, indeed, it might be an advantage, for she would not be bothered by her too easily tender heart in her dealings with him. She hated the kind of a girl who 'used' nice men.

And, with a certain prescience, she believed she would have dealings with him if he knew Fabian Knight, or could get to know him.

After this her thoughts wandered, and focused on a mental picture of the upper part of a man's head—as you would see it above a cup from which he drank.

Then the mood of exultation returned, and she drifted into sleep in the midst of it, enfolded by it.

II

At breakfast her father was grumpy. He omitted to bid her good-morning, and stared at her suspiciously from time to time, as though he wanted to accuse her of concealing guilty, sinful secrets from him. She had come in very late—past midnight, in fact. What had she been doing with that man all that time?

Helen realized what he was thinking, and for a moment it occurred to her to put his mind at rest by telling him that she had broken off her engagement. She did not, however, because she felt that if he wanted her confidence he was going about the getting of it the wrong way. How could you be frank with such quick, such unpleasant suspicion raised always against you? How stupid some people were with their children! They took away friendship, denied them the ordinary human understanding and tolerance which they gave readily enough to the rest of the world—which by comparison was of negligible importance—and then wondered why their children seemed closed books to them, alien creatures who accepted, with no gratitude, every sacrifice as no more than their due.

How could she explain herself to him? It was impossible, because he was quite sure he knew all about

her already. She couldn't say, "I am like this and like that. My views of such and such are thus and so forth."

She was not supposed to have views—at least, not views which differed from his.

What was the use of worrying about it? Hundreds and thousands of the new generation had passed through precisely the same turmoil of spirit over exactly the same thing, and to no good end and no useful purpose. Helen relaxed, became mentally supine, and went on with her egg. Her father spoke at last.

"I told Harvey that you wanted to see him, and would lunch with him to-day if it was convenient to him."

"That 'I wanted to see him'? Didn't he ask why?"

"Certainly not," replied her father stiffly. "Why should he?"

"Oh, I don't know. Was it 'convenient' to him?"

Her father had made it sound dreadful, as though she was dying to see the man, and could allow neither pride nor dignity to stand in the way.

"It was. He was particularly pleased. I hope you will get there punctually at one o'clock. He is not the kind of person to be kept waiting."

"Of course, father."

What would be the point in telling him that, although she indeed wanted badly to see Gerald Harvey, there had been no need to tell him so, and that there

would be no advantage gained in arriving too punctually?

She decided then and there to be fifteen minutes late.

She was.

Her morning was pretty full, anyway, and it took some doing to avoid being even later. The fact that the shops closed at one made it possible.

She told her father nothing of her plans, of her intention to give up the job among the carpets. He would instantly assume that she had become impatient of the independent life and was prepared to stay quietly at home and live according to his idea of her "position."

So, cutting the office and getting a certain thrill from doing so, she first of all drew twenty pounds out of the bank, and proceeded to give herself up to some thoughtful shopping. She bought stockings, and then tried on a pair of delicious half-laced shoes in dyed snakeskin —the very newest thing. They were a pinky beige, and, because she liked them so much, she had to possess them at the price of having to change her whole programme. Instead of the alternative frocks she had been picturing to herself she would have to have a dress to match the shoes. A topsy-turvy way of going about things—but they were such darling shoes.

Consequently her search, being restricted, was more difficult. But luck was with her. She found a little

bois de rose frock in Bond Street which they said was really ridiculously cheap at ten guineas, and although that seemed a terrible sum to plank down on one garment she bought it, and put it on there and then, with the shoes. A hat was the next problem, but an easier one. In these days there are comparatively few shapes, and those are made in every conceivable color.

She discovered one in which she approved of herself in the second shop she tried, and, adding yet another article to the host of derelict clothes to be sent home, she donned the new hat and set forth upon a world which was transformed. Save for the grey fox fur with which she had left home, she was entirely redressed. Heavens! But how different she felt! How much better and stronger and more able to face the uncertainty and urgency of her future!

She felt infinitely nearer to Fabian Knight. Such was the effect of a new outfit. It was wonderful!

Thus, fifteen odd minutes late, she rang the bell of Gerald Harvey's flat in Piccadilly. "Now for it," she whispered to herself, and, with a faint smile of pleasure at the thought that at last she was going to grasp a tangible rung in the ladder on which she had set her feet, she waited tensely for the next minute or so, for she knew that on what happened during them would rest the foundations of the fairy castle which she desired so terribly to build of real bricks and mortar.

A manservant opened the door.

"Miss Palmer? Mr. Harvey is expecting you, ma'am. Will you kindly come this way?"

A tall mirror in the hall afforded her a glimpse of herself, and she found it satisfactory. She knew that the frock and hat suited her admirably, and that Gerald Harvey would have to be blind indeed not to notice it.

She was ushered into a long, extravagantly furnished sitting-room, by the window of which Gerald Harvey was standing. He turned and looked at her for a moment in surprised silence, but she could not see his face because the sunlight was in her eyes. Then:

"Little Helen!" he cried, and came toward her. He caught her wrists and held her away from him, looking her up and down. "My dear," he went on, "you've turned into a beauty! How long is it since I saw you? Three years, nearly, it must be. I've been down to Bedford Park several times since, but, like last evening, you have been out. Youth is so busy, isn't it? I was glad when your father said you would like to see me. Sit down, my dear. I was afraid you weren't coming. A cocktail before lunch?"

He turned to a small table on which all the conceivable appurtenances for the manufacture of short drinks were set out.

She spoke little at first, watching him carefully. She was not surprised when he showed his *rôle* as "old friend of the family." He made allusions to his age, to his long friendship with her father, to the fact that

he had dandled her on his knee when she was little. In actual fact he was forty-seven, but did not look it.

He had one of those smooth faces masked by a healthy tan. His small black moustache was neat and military-looking; his hair, which was brushed straight back from the temples, was kept scrupulously clipped. He was exceedingly well dressed, and, although he was a dandy in the full sense of the word, he was in no way effeminate. His voice was sprightly, his bearing youthful and energetic. His unchanging attitude where women were concerned was that of polite gallantry, spiced with a suggestion of daring. He gave you to understand that he was rather a gay dog. Helen could not decide, however, whether he was really as wicked as he would like people to think him—a common enough ambition in men—and as long as he kept up this "How the years pass!" and "I was young myself once," she could not learn.

She sipped her cocktail.

"Your father," he was saying, "tells me that you have chosen to lead an independent life—follow a career. I have never said what I think about it to him, because fathers are notoriously narrow-minded about their daughters, but I can tell you, my dear, that I think it's splendid of you. Splendid! I like women, but I adore spirited women—love 'em, Helen. It gives me more pleasure, I think, than anything else."

He paused, his eyes fixed on her with rather a stare,

by which she affected not to be troubled, although secretly she found it unpleasant. She took up the conversation.

"I suppose all sensible people do approve of a girl being her own mistress—it is right that she should be, although personally I haven't looked at it from the right and wrong point of view. I've gone ahead on my own because I hated to do nothing."

He nodded approval.

"That's as it should be, and a pretty girl like you has a duty to the world. She ought to give it the benefit of living in it."

He said she was pretty. Did he mean it? He must know so many women who were better-looking, and yet his eyes were a continual evidence of his sincerity.

The manservant called them to lunch in the next room, where they sat opposite each other. A delicious meal, with grape-fruit, and little fillets of sole *meunier,* spring chicken and green peas—and then a peach Melba. After bringing coffee the manservant retired. Presently Gerald Harvey turned to a subject which she knew had been in his mind ever since she arrived.

"I hear you are engaged to be married, and that your people do not approve of the man, because, they say, he is obscure and poor and unsuccessful."

"Shall I tell you a secret?" she smiled at him.

"My hand is on my heart."

"Well, I don't approve of him either, and I have

broken it off, but not because he is obscure and poor and unsuccessful. Those things did not matter a bit; actually they made me sorry for him and want to help him. But he was getting impossible. He put his foot down too often and too stupidly."

"He did not understand you?"

"I'm afraid he didn't."

"The unforgivable sin!" he exclaimed. "My poor Helen!"

He was pretending to be sorry for her, but she could see that it had made a subtle difference to him—as though he now felt more easy in his admiration of her.

"It would have been a dreadful pity to waste yourself on him," he said. "Such a radiant person as you! You were destined for great things—it is so obvious! A simple little frock, a hat you might see on any head, and you make yourself divine!"

Helen, thinking of the money she had spent, accepted these tributes for what they were worth, at the same time finding pleasure in them. Girls like to be told nice things about themselves, and she knew she was no exception to the universal rule; but she refused to be too impressed. Adroitly she led the conversation into less personal paths, and after a while he expanded under the warmth of her encouragement to talk about people he knew, famous men and women he had met, the things he had done, the places to which he had been.

When she thought the moment ripe she said:

"The other day I saw *The Silent Place.* I thought it remarkably good."

"Ah, yes! *The Silent Place.* Estelle la Rose was perfect in it, didn't you think? I always maintain she is one of the most accomplished and gifted of them all.

"And beautiful to boot!" He smiled reminiscently.

Why, Helen asked herself with a touch of irritation, why did people always talk about the woman when she wanted to hear about the man? First the waitress, and now Gerald Harvey.

"She was certainly wonderful. She interpreted the widow with a lot of feeling. The man who wrote the play must be unusually clever—almost intuitive where women are concerned."

"Fabian Knight, you mean? I've come across him once or twice. A queer chap. Not unfriendly you know, but a bit deep. It would take some doing to get to know him really well—to understand him. Women go crazy over him, and I hear Estelle is no exception. There was some talk of a marriage, but I think it is only a rumor. She'll do her best, though, if I know Estelle, and she *has* made up her mind."

"Oh," said Helen non-committally, but her heart quickened. "Some talk of a marriage!" What was Harvey saying?

" . . . The first time I met him was last winter in Italy—at Rapaccio. He lives there most of the year,

and has a villa there. The Italian Riviera, you know."

Helen caught her breath. Were the Fates spinning for her? A light glimmered in the darkness.

"It must be wonderful out there," she said. "You go every winter, don't you?"

He nodded.

"To one place or another, for three or four months. I like the life. Pleasant people. Romantic. You have never been abroad, have you?"

"Only once—to Dieppe with the family last summer for a week. In some ways I'd rather have stayed at home. The trip only gave me an appetite for more, and I can't gratify it, I'm afraid."

He looked at her curiously, and seemed for a moment preoccupied. She had no idea what he was thinking, and she would have given much to know. Her own thoughts were fixed on the fact that Fabian Knight lived most of the year in Rapaccio, where Harvey met him—Harvey, who spent every winter in Italy? Surely these were significant facts? Hadn't she already begun her journey, even if she were not yet certain of the way?

She was granted respite from his persistent gaze by the telephone ringing in the sitting-room. Excusing himself, he went to answer it.

How was she to handle this situation, which was so very delicate, so very subtle, and yet so charged with infinite possibility? She wished that she knew more

about Harvey, wished she could be certain whether John was right or wrong about him. For it came to this. She could be justified in allowing him to be attracted by her only if he was a shade unscrupulous about women. That seemed involved, but she saw clearly that if, on the other hand, he was unaccustomed to falling casually in love—was, in fact, a nice man where women were concerned—it would be dishonest to encourage him, because she could not regard her love as free to be won. She would be accepting his emotions, and all that went with them, under false pretenses.

Seeing a definite path in front of her, she hoped he was what John had suggested him to be, recognizing that it would mean risk, but not dishonesty. And, as for the risk, had ever anything worth while been achieved without it? Was she, she asked herself, so very "moral" that she could value honesty in a thing which was so unspeakably important? Wasn't everything fair in the desire and the search for love? Women said so often enough when they contemplated acting accordingly; but, judging by her own feeling that to take advantage of a decent man would be unsporting, she judged that the axiom was used more as a sop for an aggravated conscience than as an expression of true conviction.

In the midst of her reflections she realized that Harvey had left the sitting-room door open and that she could hear what he was saying over the 'phone.

" . . . I am very sorry, my dear, but it cannot be

helped. What I told you this morning is definitely final. . . ." He paused, interrupted by the person at the other end. Then continued, "Oh, I know, I know! We've covered all that ground before—and a thousand times if once. What is the use of keeping open a wound? Must all women delight in it? In a week's time you'll see my point of view and agree with me."

Helen dismissed the scruple that she was eavesdropping, and listened. There was another pause, and then he spoke again.

"I'm afraid you can't. I'm very busy this week. . . . Now? That is impossible. I am engaged. . . . Yes, final. . . . Good-bye."

The receiver clicked, and he returned. She saw, and no moustache could have hidden, the vague, cruel curve of his mouth. She realized suddenly that his voice had been louder than was averagely necessary when using a telephone; that he had, indeed, consciously raised it that she might hear what he was saying . . . to another woman.

She saw also that he had made use of an actual and, to some unfortunate girl, poignant incident, to convince her that he was a gay dog; and the crudity of his strategy, even more than the deliberate callousness of his attitude, showed her more effectively than she realized at the time that he was not one on whom the finer considerations need be wasted.

He rubbed his hands.

"What were we talking about? I am sorry to have left you—a waste of precious time! Shall we go into the other room? It is more comfortable . . ." And when he had arranged the cushions for her in a deep, yielding chair in the sitting-room: "We were on Italy, weren't we?"

"Yes. I was saying how I should love to go there—to travel."

"You ought to, you know. It would do you good—expand your mind—and your heart. I have a theory that nobody really lives until he or she gets right away from the influences of the early years—from the home and the environment which has not appreciably changed since the days of childhood perhaps. What do you think?"

"I've never tried to look at it like that—so scientifically. I only know I want to move about the world—to see people and places—to live more widely than I do now."

He nodded.

"Women are wiser than we men. They don't bother with words or unnecessary analysis. They have their feelings, understand them, and act on them."

"Well, I can't act on this one," she laughed, and the two rows of white teeth seemed to him whiter than many he had seen.

"No. I suppose you can't."

She noticed a green Chinese porcelain vase on a

side-table, and admired it, and the conversation departed from personalities for a while. Then, when she judged the moment come, she said she must go, and he, as she had hoped, instantly vetoed the suggestion.

"But it's early. What can you have to do at three o'clock in the afternoon?"

"Lots of things!"

"Nonsense. I can't let you go! After three long years? No. I have rediscovered you, and I insist on making the most of the experience."

"You don't often rediscover people?"

"I assure you it is the first time. Usually people you haven't met for years turn out to be worse than impossible—dreadfully disappointing. And you—well, you, as a shining exception, prove the rule. I promise you, my dear, I've never been so pleased with myself."

While he was talking he had moved to her chair, and, pausing for a moment as though he was about to seat himself on the arm of it, he patted her shoulder with a hand which was supposed to be avuncular, but which seemed slightly something else. Just what, Helen could not define, but the sensation she got from it was of a nature similar to that she felt when he stared at her.

She moved her shoulder a fraction of an inch in a gesture which was not exactly resentful, but if he were at all nervous he might excusably believe it such. She must always, at all costs, keep him a little doubtful of

where he stood with her. The movement had the effect she desired in that he strolled about the room for a moment before returning to his own chair, talking all the time about how nice it was to have met her.

"Think!" he said. "If I hadn't dined with your people yesterday I mightn't have seen you for another three years, by which time——"

He stopped, and she did not ask him, "By which time —what?" He paused, and then jumped straight to the subject of her work.

"You must get rather sick of it."

"I do," she admitted, with confiding frankness.

"Carpets, isn't it? I can't think of it, looking at you, without a feeling of indignation. Carpets!"

"Oh, they aren't so bad. It's better than sitting at home——"

"Living the life of the last generation."

"That's what it comes to. I suppose I'm selfish, and so forth. Dad tells me I am."

"Because he doesn't understand. He says you're ungrateful, I suppose."

"Yes. And that I'm wasting my opportunities."

"Oh, he thinks that! What opportunities?"

"Of a good marriage. Of social success."

"Social success, eh?"

"But, of course, we haven't the money to lead social lives in that sense. Bedford Park has a society of a kind, naturally—of pleasant, workaday people who do

things in the world; but there's nothing of *Eve* and *The Tatler* about them. As things are I might just as well work."

He considered her a moment, and she awaited expectantly the question to which she had been leading him.

"You're not satisfied, then, with things? I mean that, without being exactly 'ambitious' in the social sense—it's an unpleasant word—you would like to see a broader, brighter life?"

"I would."

"Hum," he said. "I must think."

"*You,* Uncle Gerald?"

"*Uncle!*" he cried in mock alarm. "*Uncle* Gerald!"

"I've always called you that, ever since I was tiny."

"But you're not tiny any more. No, no! 'Uncle Gerald' won't do at all. Unadorned 'Gerald' is much kinder to me."

She smiled.

"What can Gerald, then, do for me?"

"I hate the idea of those carpets."

She was silent, triumphant. She had given him a lead, and he was following it. She had shown no disinclination to accept his help; indeed, she had all but asked for it. His vanity was flattered, his interest in her established.

Now she must go, and quickly. She rose, and he

deprecated her going. She said she really must, and added:

"You aren't to bother yourself about me, you know. I'm quite all right, really, jogging along."

"You're not! That's just it."

"You're very kind," she murmured softly, smiling at him.

He put his arm about her shoulders and pressed her to his side for a moment.

"Now, little woman, you leave it to me."

If there was one term of affection she detested it was "little woman." What a bounder he was!

"Look here. Don't let's go our ways yet," he urged. "You haven't any particular appointment or anything, have you? Why shouldn't we go somewhere and dance? Savoy, or the Piccadilly, across the street. What say?"

She hesitated, looking at him. His eyes, she thought, were nicely compelling.

"I—I'd love to," she said.

CHAPTER IV

MOVEMENT

I

She reached home at about twenty minutes to seven, having danced and talked, and talked and danced, with Harvey until she was glad to leave him. Already the strain had commenced. The evening was chilly, suggesting the end of the warm spell, and she was glad of her fur. She must see about finding an autumn coat—and maybe go to Lilian's about a suit. She rather liked herself in black, and there was always something neat and pleasing about a well-tailored black coat and skirt. It would have to have patent leather shoes, though. It could not be helped. At least fifty of the two hundred pounds would have to go on clothes. The rest would last how long? Four, six months? It would depend on what happened.

And of what was going to happen she had no notion. She had only her hope and her optimism.

She saw none of the family on the way up to her room, and was glad, for her new clothers would inevitably bring forth comment which would be either critical or admiring, neither of which did she feel equal to facing at the moment.

Nothing peculiarly indicative of the direction in which

the wind would blow had appeared during the tea-dance at the Piccadilly. Harvey had been attentive, pleased, and very full of himself. He had been at some pains to make himself agreeable, and at the same time convince her that he was really an unusually fine fellow. He had danced averagely, but confessed that the Charleston was too much for him. He waltzed quite well.

"The tango is more popular than anything else on the Continent," he told her. "Although the Italian dancing is surprisingly bad from our point of view. Too temperamental; too many arms and legs, you know, and the bands are rotten, generally speaking."

She had got him talking about Italy. It seemed that he was thinking of going out some time in October—in about a fortnight or three weeks. Where was he going? He did not know. Never knew until the last moment. He might be late getting off this year. Why? "I have you to consider," he had said.

"That sounds very flattering. But you wouldn't put off your journey just because I hadn't a job I liked?"

"I'm not so sure of that," he had assured her gallantly. "I tell you frankly, Helen, I'm interested in you."

He had watched for the effect of this announcement, and was slightly disappointed at not achieving any particular one. She seemed to have heard what he said, but to have missed its significance; to have taken him

to mean he was merely interested in her as "an old friend of the family," a part in which she was determined to see him as often and as long as possible, for in that way she might keep him at arm's length.

She slipped off her dress, and could not help contrasting the movement with the similar performance of twenty-four hours ago, when the brown frock she wore at the office had lain in a despised heap. To-day she carefully and affectionately hung up in the wardrobe the *bois de rose,* the ten-guinea creation to which she felt she owed much of the day's success. She put on a dressing-gown, and, lying down on the bed, reviewed the progress she had made.

It was pretty good. The eagerness with which Harvey had issued a string of invitations showed her that, and although at first she had been incredulous of his sincerity she now realized it and saw how logical it was. To begin with, he was a woman-lover, and she could readily understand that she must be different from the type with whom he was usually successful, although she had no certainty as to just what kind of woman 'fell for' him. She knew, however, that seldom, if ever, would he impress anyone like herself. Consequently he was finding the situation a novel one, and, to a man who adventured continually in the tender passion, the novel must soon become the chief stimulus and attraction.

She regarded his unscrupulousness with loathing and

admiration. The fact that he had known the father for years did not enter his head as a reason for leaving the daughter alone. To his mill all was grist. Any faint compunction about taking full advantage of him which she may have felt at the beginning had been for ever removed in the course and development of the afternoon. If she could use her sex, and all her instincts where sex was concerned, to subjugate him, she would. And she saw no reason at all why she should not, in the course of the process, order circumstances to the end that she might be brought nearer Fabian Knight, which had become her sole ambition, her great determination.

The whole machinery of Harvey's mind was so clear to her, and equally clear was the way to keep alive his interest in her.

Primarily she must blind herself to the object of his tactics and his crude intentions, and refuse, obstinately, even to the point of stupidity, to understand for what end he was working. She must be nice to him, be impressed by his cleverness, be grateful to him; but, regarding the deeper aspects of the emotional, she must remain placidly asleep. Occasionally, very occasionally, she might open an eye for a moment and appear to understand, but must instantly become frightened and doubtful of what she saw. She must, in fact, be acutely virginal.

She could not help seeing that above all these considerations, these minute details, there was the need to persuade him, without his realizing it, firstly to winter

at Rapaccio, and secondly to have her out there, some of the time at least. Surely it could be worked somehow? For one thing, when the time came for him to leave England, and he found he had not progressed as far as he had hoped, he would seize practically any feasible suggestion which she might make for keeping her with him.

And the form of that suggestion was already in her mind.

II

She was able to make it sooner than she had thought, for the simple and satisfactory reason that he made at least half of it himself.

During the week which elapsed between her first lunch with him and that never-to-be-forgotten moment in Richmond Park when she proved to herself that she was not incapable of intrigue, and that she had actually turned the first corner in the difficult road to which she had set her feet, she saw an incredible amount of Gerald Harvey. She lunched with him, danced with him, went to *matinées,* and went long drives with him into the country in his smooth, suave Daimler. Always they were tête-a-tête.

Harvey, however, gave her to understand that she was treating him badly in not spending more of her time with him. Had she not definitely and for ever given up the carpets? Had she another job to occupy her? No! Then her leisure was infinite.

How could he discuss her future—her next job—if she wouldn't dine at the flat in peace and quiet? Dinner at the Ritz, dancing at the different restaurants and hotels was all very well, but two people couldn't 'get together' about serious matters in that kind of atmosphere.

Helen listened sympathetically, but she did not dine at the flat. Nor did she accept all his other invitations, feeling that the more she put him off the keener would he be to see her.

It occurred to her more than once in those days to visit the Café Corona at after-theatre time in the hope of seeing Fabian Knight, but she saw several objections to the plan. Probably he would never go to the place again now that his play had come off. Another consideration was the fact that when she met him in Italy she did not want him to recognize her. And there was also her pride. No, she would wait with what patience she could muster.

And then Richmond Park late on a golden afternoon, when the brown stubble of bracken, the litter of leaves, and the half-naked trees lay under a low, slanting sun.

They had lunched at Kettner's, where she had enjoyed the food, but had found no pleasure in her companion's efforts to elucidate various facts concerning women which she already knew. His mental heaviness was dreadful, and it amazed her that a man who had

every reason to boast—and did—about his conquests of women should really be so stupid. The longer she knew him, the lower became her opinion of those members of her sex who had preceded her. It was an unpleasant feeling. If you were going to be made love to by a villain, let him at least be a villain who had trespassed in better-class hearts!

The Daimler slid comfortably to Richmond, and he suggested that they should leave the car near White Lodge and walk. As usual, she fell in with his wishes.

Before alighting or allowing her to, he sat for a moment when he had stopped the car and talked rapidly about the beauties of the scene before them.

"You can't beat England, you know. Can't beat it for subtlety. Admittedly you do have to go to Switzerland for impressive and spectacular country. . . . Great mountains and valleys and snows. And to Italy for blazing colors——"

Helen's thoughts jumped a little, as they inevitably did in these days whenever that country was mentioned

"Yes," she said.

"——but you'll never find those half-tones—those gentle, sweeping contours—those admirable woods, glowing in gentle sunlight——" He flung out his hand.

"It *is* wonderful," she agreed, and wished, since she needed no guide to help her appreciate the perfection of what her eyes beheld, that he would keep quiet about it and just let her look.

Then, without warning, he dropped his hand on hers, where they were folded on her lap, and held them.

She did not move.

"I can't think of another woman in the world I'd rather be with at this moment," he said, and, neglecting the scenery, favored her with a glance in which she read definite declaration—a message she ignored with all the self-possession she could muster.

"You say nice things," she murmured. "I am lucky——"

"Nonsense. I mean them too!"

She refused to meet his eyes.

"You must be kind to me," he urged. "You have me in the palm of your slim hand. You see—I—feel very deeply about you."

She said nothing, because she knew that at this point she was expected to give him a lead; to ask him, in some manner or another, in what way she was to be kind and in which direction he felt deeply about her.

Her silence and lack of immediate response drew him up, and then he reflected that half her charm lay in her refreshing youth, and that he must not be impatient. After all, to be made love to by him must be a new and slightly breath-taking experience for her after John Foster's amateurish efforts. His own dash and daring, as yet scarcely shown, was proving somewhat of a revelation to her.

In this, as in so many other matters, he was wrong.

His methods had never been in the nature of a revelation to her, and never could be. In fact, he was behaving as for some days past she had been expecting him to behave.

She continued to allow him to hold her hands.

In a minute he would try to kiss her.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "I am getting confoundedly fond of you. . . ." He put his left arm behind her shoulders.

"You know—you—really oughtn't to say *that* kind of thing! I mean——"

"Hush, dear child! Whatever you do, you mustn't on any account worry."

He relinquished her hands and lifted her chin.

She felt a perfect fool. It irked her to have to play the abashed innocent with him when all her instincts prompted her to smack his face hard—really hard.

"Oh!" she said suddenly. "Hadn't we better walk before it gets too damp and chilly? Let's go down the hill toward the Causeway—across the ponds."

She broke the spell for him, and for some while after they left the car he was silent and glum.

It was the greatest test of her nerve that she had to chatter away to him about trivialities when she knew all the time that upon the mood into which he emerged from his present one depended the success or failure of her careful strategy.

The Fates, which had been spinning for her from the beginning, did not desert her.

"Look here," he burst out unexpectedly, taking her arm. "I don't feel at all like going to Italy next week, leaving you here in town."

She made no effort to disengage her arm; indeed, she very gently encouraged his clasp. Her heart was beating swiftly with half-nervous, half-triumphant excitement.

"Why should you?" she asked, pitching her voice low.

"You mean why should I go to Italy at all? Well, my dear, it——"

"No, no! I meant why shouldn't I go with you?"

He stiffened with pleasure and surprise, and hastily she hurried on:

"Don't you need a secretary out there? You have one in England sometimes——"

He stopped in mid-stride and looked at her.

"Jove! That's an idea! But the conventions, my dear? Ah! Christabel, my elder sister, is always after me to take her out. That will make the household perfectly respectable, won't it?"

"Yes."

"And your people? They'll let you?"

"Of course. You're the oldest friend the family has."

He had almost forgotten that.

"You'll like it, Helen? You would?" His

fingers tightened about her arm. How soft it was!

She turned her eyes upon him, and he cursed the dusk which hid the expression in them.

"I would love it," she said quietly.

"Good! That's fine!"

He was so pleased with himself and her that he all but ran her down the slope toward the Causeway. Presently, a little breathlessly, she said she thought they had gone far enough and had better turn.

"Of course. Why, you're out of breath, my poor child! I am an ass! But I was so excited. Jove! We'll have a good time! I'll take a villa somewhere——"

"And I must buy a typewriter——"

"A typewriter? Oh, yes—naturally."

Then, presently, she pulled back the last arrow in her bow:

"I was looking at some photographs of Rapaccio the other day. It looks absolutely adorable. Couldn't you take the villa there?"

"Rapaccio? Well—let's see. There are a lot of English there—Anglo-Indians, you know—and they are a gossipy crowd."

"I shan't mind *that,*" said Helen decisively.

"Very well, then—Rapaccio let it be!"

She sighed, very secretly, with relief. The arrow had found its target.

"Fabian Knight," cried her heart joyously.

CHAPTER V

RAPACCIO

I

A WEEK later, at the same hour in the afternoon, she was sitting in the Blue Train, its smooth, drumming wheels carrying her southward across the plains of Northern France toward the sunshine of the Mediterranean. Soon it would encircle Paris, that gay-faced lady; and so, through the night, to the southern dawn.

Gerald Harvey sat opposite her, reading a yellow French novel, and by her side, dozing comfortably, was his sister, Mrs. Anstruther, a plump, placid woman of fifty or so with a mauve-tinted complexion; a pleasant, innocuous nonentity, whose chief asset in life was a profound knowledge of Debrett, and whose greatest joy was *The Tatler.*

Helen found it difficult to believe that at last the journey was begun; indeed, almost half-way to completion. The cross-Channel passage had been a thrill of pleasure all the way: a jumble of many faces of a dozen nationalities. There were large Englishmen in plus-fours—in these days a conventional travelling garb; there were small Frenchmen in cloth-topped boots, and all the shades of form and size in women. There were

piles of suitcases, shiny black hat-boxes, seasick children, blue-smocked French porters, and the cobbles of the *quai* at Calais. It was all so romantic, and infinitely suggestive of the wider world into which she was adventuring.

Of the six days which had elapsed since the afternoon with Gerald Harvey in Richmond Park she retained only confused memories interspersed with sharper and clearer visions. Buying a letter of credit for a hundred and fifty pounds, and her father's good-bye, for instance.

"Mind you, Helen, if it were not Mr. Harvey I should not have given my consent. You will be safe with him—and his sister. . . . These foreigners. . . . You must be grateful to him, and work conscientiously. His book of essays will be important. You are very lucky. Mind you write to us often. . . ."

She was pleased to hear that Harvey contemplated a book of essays. It was the first she had heard about it.

Her father had tried to disguise his satisfaction that she was going to be separated from "that man Foster," and, in sublime ignorance of what he was doing, had committed his daughter to the care of Gerald Harvey. A pathetic situation!

Her mother had cried a little as was her wont on such occasions, and had beseeched her to wear plenty of underclothes, because the Riviera weather was treacherous and deceptive.

The parting had been no light matter, and the relief at having got it over was considerable. In leaving them she had learnt fully and afresh how fond they were of her. They were dear things. She would always respect them. They had done their best for her, obeying what they called their "duty by her" according to their interpretation of what it meant.

Funny how far away and in the past they were!

And there sat Gerald Harvey reading: a Gerald Harvey who was very much of the present.

She had seen little of him, to her satisfaction, during the last week. He had been busy with arrangements of various kinds, among which had been fixing up the tenancy of the Villa Passionata with the agents at Rapaccio. It was a large house on the hill which he knew from last year's visit to the town.

The interval before setting out, therefore, he had perforce regarded as a lull in his campaign. The knowledge that he would have her under the same roof with him for a number of months sufficed.

Now, faced by him and the fact that between them was only the weakest of barriers in the form of Mrs. Anstruther, who believed him to be at least a minor deity, Helen felt a sense of panic. However she regarded it a net was closing about her.

The wild notion came to her of jumping out of the train when next it stopped—the Gare de Lyon at Paris, for instance—and, before it was too late, of taking the

next train back to England. She dismissed the idea with a return of optimism which was supported by her conviction that she could look after herself.

Besides, she had gone so far now. There must be no turning back.

Every thump of the wheels brought her a few yards nearer Fabian Knight, of whom she thought constantly. Had he reached Rapaccio yet? How long would it take her to meet him? And, having met him, how much longer to make him love her?

Sometimes the weight of the undertaking seemed greater than she could bear; at others, according to her mood, it appeared comparatively simple. Arduously, determinedly, she kept the exultation of the first moment before her like a guiding torch, telling herself that the burning, passionate joy of it, a joy so much greater than any words could express or biased hope devise, must, *must* mean something.

Then Paris, where the train waited for a while, in the great, stony importance of the Gare de Lyon, before pursuing its luxurious way; dinner in the restaurant-car; the two beds with red blankets on top, all magically produced from the shining walnut of the compartment. She and Mrs. Anstruther together, and Harvey next door with a fat French marquis who smelt of eau-de-Cologne. And Harvey's "Good night"; his eyes saying that it was a pity Mrs. Anstruther was there. "Are you happy, little girl?" Her murmured assent—her look

of gratitude. Mrs. Anstruther's "You're younger than I, my dear," and the climb up the rickety little step-ladder into the upper berth. The strange sensation of undressing in a train—wearing only a nightgown. Suppose there were an accident? Snuggling down, switching out the side-lamp so that all the illumination was a very dim blueness from the light in the roof. Swaying, swaying, back and forth. Would she ever be able to sleep? What an adventure it was, though! A thousand impressions . . . it was incredible that so many new ones could attach themselves to a mere train-journey by night.

Swaying, swaying through the darkness—miles and miles and miles. . . .

Then sleep, a fitful awakening. Where was she? Memory, pulling up the red blanket which rubbed against her cheek. Sleep again . . . swaying. . . .

A shaft of sunlight across her eyes. . . .

Morning.

The first morning. . . .

A glimpse of a turquoise sea; a marvellous sea. Palms; white, red-roofed houses, and more palms. . . .

A new world. . . .

After Nice, fairy-tale Monaco standing into the blue sea, and straggling Mentone, came at length Ventimiglia, the Italian frontier station. This was at one o'clock, immediately after an early lunch. Here they

passed through the customs, and exchanged the luxury of the Blue Train for the sulphur-smelling, dusty red plush of an Italian first-class compartment.

"Three hours from Rapaccio," said Harvey, with an air of relief. He was showing the wearing effects of travel, for he was one of those men temperamentally unsuited to long train-journeys. He looked, and was, grimy, and, in spite of the amenities provided by the *wagons-lits* company, he had neglected to shave. Helen, who was accustomed to and disliked his unswerving immaculateness, found him no less unsavory now that he had lost it.

He presented them with bunches of violets, and disappeared to buy Italian papers.

"Isn't he the most charming man?" said Mrs. Anstruther, whose adoration of him was curious; indeed, it was the only active and unplacid thing in her.

"Yes," replied Helen, and noticed that the violets, as she learnt later was true of most Italian flowers, had no scent. Symbolic, she thought, of Harvey's charm.

The train set off pompously, and proceeded to follow the tortuous conformation of the coast, the track having the sea close on one side and a barrier of mountainous cliffs on the other. The hills were grey with olives, and dark, needle-pointed cypress stood at intervals among them. Clustering villages nestled in the valleys

below the heights. It was an impressive country, warm-tinted and glowing under the bright sun.

Bordighera, Ospedaletti, San Remo—and so on. Helen watched, silent, and ever eager for the next beauty. She was glad Harvey's low spirits prevented eulogies on the unfolding scene.

Then, midway between Diano Marina and Andora, at about half-past three, Martin Fayre came.

He came as he lived, casually, negligently, smiling. A cool, monosyllabic young man who was perhaps the most good-looking she had ever seen. He was walking along the corridor, and stopped at the door when he saw Gerald Harvey.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Hullo!" replied Harvey.

"Thought I saw you at Ventimiglia." He glanced from Helen to Mrs. Anstruther, and back to Helen. His blue eyes remained on her, a glance of deep solemnity belied by the cheerfulness of his voice.

"My sister, Mrs. Anstruther," said Harvey. "Mr. Martin Fayre, Christabel. And—er—Miss Palmer, my secretary," he added, remembering that they were in the neighborhood of local society.

"How do you do?" remarked the young man.

"So you're out again? Come in and sit down a minute."

"Sorry, got some friends with me. Anyway, next's

Andora—get out there. Bags, and so on." He smiled suddenly and illuminatingly at Helen.

His eyes disconcerted her. They never left her face.

Harvey fidgeted.

"Perhaps we shall see something of you at Rapaccio? I've taken Villa Passionata for the season. You come over a good deal, don't you?"

Martin Fayre nodded.

"Over to-morrow. Tennis. I'll dine with you."

Then, as abruptly as he had appeared, he went.

Helen took a deep breath.

"Nice chap," commented Harvey. "He has a huge estate at Andora, with a feudal castle which is always full of friends, whom he neglects assiduously. He plays tennis and dances, and so on, at Rapaccio. He's gay, and dreadfully rich."

"Oh, yes," she said absently.

It was conceivable that Martin Fayre possessed lands and castles and friends, and played tennis and danced. But did he look at everybody like that?

II

She was tired that day, and went early to bed. It was not until next morning that she began again to gather impressions. She awoke in a large four-poster bed hung with mosquito curtains, and became aware of brilliant sunshine pouring in through the long French

windows. She lay happily for several minutes, content with the knowledge that this was Italy, this was Rapaccio. Another step in the ladder was under her feet.

She swung her feet out of bed into her slippers, and put on a kimono. It was a big room on the ground floor, the villa being a bungalow. The walls were pale green, the floor red-tiled and covered for the most part with rugs. She went to an enormous dressing-table, fashioned with a low middle part and high sides, and brushed out her hair, powdered her nose, and went through the open window on to the wide veranda.

The sun was delicious, warm, golden, above the glittering sea; it caressed her body, and she opened her soul to its embrace. This was sunshine!

From where she stood she could see spread out below her the whole panorama of Rapaccio, and the crescent bay on the shores of which it was. Grey roofs, red roofs, pink roofs, and roofs of every imaginable color, palm-trees, and narrow black chasms of streets striking through the huddled buildings.

Nearer and higher were the villas, following a winding carriage-road up the hill, and set in the midst of luxuriant, semi-tropical vegetation. The garden of Villa Passionata fell terrace by terrace to that of the villa immediately below it, a small, beautiful building, pale, rose-colored, and with a pergola running out from it which was ablaze with red and yellow roses, their

masses glowing bright like jewels set in the dark jade of sombre evergreens.

She looked long at this villa, for last night Harvey had said, speaking of the villa residents, "Fabian Knight's place is just below us, as far as I remember. I wonder if he has arrived yet."

Helen wondered that too; pondered, and asked the question of her particular Fate many times.

Now, in the revealing sunlight, she saw that green shutters obscured the windows, and that no one moved about the place, and that there was neither smoke nor quiver of heat from any chimney.

No cloud hid the sun at that moment, but some of the warmth went out of it, and she pulled the kimono closer to her.

She had arrived before him. She realized suddenly, with a sense of shock, that it might be weeks and weeks before he came—and even that he might not come at all! She had merely Harvey's vague assertion. "He lives at Rapaccio most of the time," on which to base her whole hope! She had not regarded before this weakness in the foundations of her so-far promising castle. The very fact that its beginning had been mysterious and significant had blinded her to possible frailty in practicality. How easily might Fabian Knight have changed his mind; decided to winter in Spain or Africa! So little was within the scope of her control, and so much beyond it.

She feasted her eyes on his house. It was his home; where he had lived, where he had slept, and where he had loved, perhaps—for she had never disguised from herself the certainty that when she came to him she would not be the first. He was too attractive and too human. He had worked in that garden; perhaps written *The Silent Place* there, and so woven a new triumph for Estelle la Rose, and a new love for himself.

Did he love her? Was it on account of her that he had not reached Rapaccio yet? On account of her that he might never reach it?

"He *can't* love her!" she cried out within herself, in passionate support of her hope. What was there in the actress which could appeal to him save beauty of face and body, and virtue of a kindred art? And yet any one of those, and less, might form Love's concealing veil!

She pressed down her palms on the stone balustrade and closed her eyes. The sun shone red through her lids, and was warm upon them.

If only he were here, where with her own eyes she could see him and watch him and find out what was happening to him! She felt she would need only to see his face once to know what was in his heart, for, although the veil might blind her also, she could bring the clear vision of the suffering lover to its penetration.

The green shutters stared back blankly at her; dull, sightless, and impertinent in their uncommunicative

stupidity. The red and yellow roses, perfuming the still morning, shone up at her with an empty beauty. The sea sparkled. . . .

There was a movement by her side.

"And how is my little one this morning?" said Harvey in her ear, and put his arm about her shoulders. He had come silently along the veranda.

Stiffening for a moment, she went limp. She knew that she must play out the game to a finish, even when defeat hovered in the sunlit air. He wore a purple silk dressing-gown—a horrible thing.

"Oh!" she said. "You made me jump! I'm inadequately dressed. I must——"

She escaped his arm and ran into her room, closing the glass doors.

His pleased, self-complacent laugh followed her, and through the thin net curtains she saw him outlined against the brightness of the morning. He was rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI

FABIAN

MARTIN FAYRE was half an hour late for dinner, but his delinquency was not permitted to interfere with the serving of the meal at 7.30.

The smooth working of the household was a revelation to Helen after such things in England. The staff, which seemed inordinately large, was efficiently controlled by one Pepeto Garassini, who was butler, footman, housekeeper, majordomo, and steward of the estate—and anything else he fancied—all rolled into one bald, bristling, fat little Italian body of extreme pomposity, charm, and imperturbability.

"Il Signore Fayre," he stated, "coma aler-way late *Tarde! Tarde! Tarde!*" and incontinently forced them to begin by ushering in two plump parlor-maids bearing huge bowls of *minestrone,* a soup in which every conceivable vegetable, and some others, were represented in varying-sized pieces. Helen sprinkled grated cheese on it, and wondered at Pepeto's knowledge of Martin Fayre's habits, until she reflected that in a place like Rapaccio your servants knew the gentry as well if not better than you did—because the gentry had servants also.

She hoped vaguely that Martin Fayre would not come at all that night. It was not that she did not feel equal to coping with a new personality, for after all there were Harvey and Mrs. Anstruther to bear the brunt of entertaining him if such was his need. But it had been again a day of many impressions, and therefore tiring. Accompanied by Harvey and his sister, she had joined the English Library, the English Club, and the Tennis Club, and in the course of it all had been introduced to a good many people whom Harvey had met the year before. He seemed to be popular, and she decided that it was mainly because he belonged to the smart set in town, while the villa people at Rapaccio did not, but would have liked to. She detected, very soon indeed, a certain snobbishness in the atmosphere. It was true that she met these people as Harvey's secretary, but they seemed to register the salient fact that she was a secretary before anything else. The men were, of course, nicer to her than the women. She was rather sorry for the men she saw, and could imagine that most of them would rather have been anywhere else. They were elderly and retired, and missed the world of action perhaps. They were disposed to be melancholy at the thought of another winter in the place, among people with whom they had played bridge and quarreled so often before. It struck her, too, that they suffered largely from their wives.

She saw that she would dislike those wives, and the

snobbery of those wives, quite a lot before she left Rapaccio. They resented her youth and despised her secretaryship now, and later they would resent her because of Fabian Knight, whom they looked upon as the big gun of the place. He had money, and an international reputation as a writer; he had just produced a successful play, was unmarried, entertained sparingly but with excessive brilliance, and, for reasons Helen could readily understand, kept himself slightly aloof.

No one, for instance, knew when, if at all this year, he was going to open up Villa Silencia, as his villa was named.

They had adequate excuse, she considered, for regarding him as they did.

"So sorry, I'm sure," said Martin Fayre from the doorway. "I changed at the Tennis Club, and lost a stud. Played too late, for that matter."

He came forward, smiling boyishly, and greeted Mrs. Anstruther. He took Helen's hand for a moment, his eyes on Harvey, who was saying:

"Pepeto told us you might be late, and refused to put off dinner a minute."

"Pepeto knows his job. Tried to steal him for Castello Andora. No good. Andora's the primitive wild as far as he's concerned."

He shot at the gentleman in question a sentence of musical Italian which evoked an unprofessional giggle.

Dinner proceeded, and Helen had the experience of

eating at the same table with two men who were reckoned high among their fellows and a lady who, if she was neither beautiful nor dramatically intelligent, was at least on nodding terms with half Debrett.

In spite of his monosyllabic method of conversation Martin Fayre managed to compete in a creditable manner with Harvey's smooth loquacity. The young man's very frugality in the use of words lent an amusing distinction to what he said.

Helen liked him better than her first impression had suggested she would, but that was often the way. He had been just a little too cool and collected and self-assured yesterday afternoon. To-night he was quite charming, and it was a relief to her to be in the presence of a man who was. She had had Gerald Harvey in such large doses that without knowing it she had come to regard the male sex—with, of course, the exception of Fabian Knight, who was outside these unconscious considerations—with some despair. It was a difficult, heavy-handed sex.

Martin Fayre revived her faith in its capacity for delicacy of thought and word and gesture. He was singularly free from conceit, and untroubled by the conventionalism of outlook which she had noticed in local society.

But there was one thing during dinner which slightly perplexed and even worried her. This was Martin Fayre's unshakable determination not to look once at

her, although she sat opposite him, and in the most natural direction for his eyes to turn. Studiously, assiduously, he avoided her.

It is very odd, thought Helen, that he should have stared so uncomfortably at me yesterday and to-day refuses to favor me with the vaguest attention!

Admittedly she was glad he had not repeated his peculiar behavior, but on reflection, this complete reversal in strategy—could she call it that?—seemed quite as ominous. She did not know what to think. She would have liked him to notice her a little, for her creamy-white evening frock suited her admirably, and she felt she was looking her best.

He told them stories of life in his Andora castle, and showed a large understanding of and sympathy for the Italians, at the same time deploring the English attitude in Rapaccio.

"Too many Anglo-Indians. They set the pace. English dominant race in the world, and so on. . . . Everybody else is a nigger or a dago. Old General Pilk t'other day at the Club said the English girls oughtn't to dance at the Pallaria in the village, because all the natives went there. 'For God's sake,' he said, 'let's all stick to Pontenero's and keep the place *white*!' "

"The wives," observed Helen, "seem rather the same way."

"Ah, the wives!" sighed Fayre, and fell eloquently silent.

But he did not look at her then, nor yet at any other moment throughout the meal. Harvey, on the other hand, gazed at her occasionally with a mixture of roguery and fondness which exasperated her. She hoped to goodness the others did not notice it. Mrs. Anstruther, by nature unobservant, was interested in her food, but Martin Fayre was one of those people on whom little is lost. He was a stranger, and a nice man; two good reasons why she would not like him to misinterpret her relationship with Harvey.

The end of dinner was conspicuously marked by the arrival of General and Mrs. Pilk; the Pilk, Helen assumed, to which Fayre had referred. Coffee was being served in the long drawing-room, of which the four wide French windows were open to the night, when Pepeto announced, *"Il Generalissimo e Signora Pilk"* in a grand voice.

"We thought we'd be the first to pay our respects, what?" said the General.

"We're charmed to see you," Harvey said, the necessary introductions effected. Apparently after-dinner calls were *de rigueur* in Rapaccio.

The General was a small, wizened man, with a large moustache which obscured his mouth. His wife was a more buxom figure, with bright red cheeks and a gallant attitude toward her age in the matter of her clothes, which were, to say the least of it, girlish.

General Pilk eyed Martin Fayre.

"You here, Fayre! I think we meet in the singles tournament to-morrow. What?"

"Yes."

"Beat you this time, eh?"

"No," said Martin Fayre.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the General bleakly, and without particular reason.

Helen thought him an irritating little man. He sat down next to her and said, "What?" at the end of each remark. He seemed dreadfully perturbed because there was no golf-course at Rapaccio.

"Fayre's laying out one at Andora. Not only has he plenty of space in the valley there, but plenty of money to afford a little thing like a golf-course of his own, the lucky devil! What?"

Then he became weightily but stickily complimentary. "We don't get enough of you young and pretty ones out here, Miss Palmer. You must come up to tea—or have tea with us at the Tennis Club to-morrow—to celebrate Fayre's defeat, eh?" He winked prodigiously.

"What about some bridge?" said Martin Fayre.

Mrs. Pilk's eyes gleamed in her gleaming face. Bridge, you gathered, was the Mecca of her desire.

"We're six," said Harvey. "No, five. I forgot—you don't play, do you, Helen? I'll stand out, and there'll be a table."

"No. We'll cut in the regulation manner," replied Fayre. "Why should a host be penalized just because he is one?"

A table and cards were brought, and the five of them cut. Martin drew a king.

"You're out, Fayre. You will have the honor of entertaining Miss Palmer for the first rubber."

"Don't worry about me," said Helen quickly. "I want to wander in the garden."

"Good," remarked the young man. "I'm all for the moon myself."

And so, before she knew what was happening, she found herself in the quiet night with Martin Fayre. He led her down the steps to the lower terraces.

"Got one gift," he remarked. "Can always cut high when the need arises. Anyway, it's my lucky day."

This did not agree with his attitude during dinner, and Helen marked it with dismay. She had the wayward feeling of being alone with a man who was quite unlike any other young man she had ever known. The young men in Bedford Park did not live in Italian castles and lay out private golf-courses when the mood seized them. Besides, there lingered in her memory his disconcerting stare.

They strolled in silence for a while, under the biggest, brightest moon she had ever imagined. It shone upon the garden, upon the town, upon the sea. Its light was quite green, and the shadows of those places where it did not penetrate were blacker than any shadows. The heavy, intoxicating scent of growing things were in her nostrils. The beauty of it all made her

tremble a little. How warm the air was; how serene and cold the moon!

"Look here," said Martin Fayre, with characteristic abruptness, and stopping dead at the same moment. "What the devil are you doing here?"

The tone in which he spoke took her breath away.

"Why, walking in the garden with Mr. Martin Fayre," she replied.

"I mean, and you know I mean, what are you doing in Villa Passionata—in the same house with Harvey?"

"Isn't that just a little impertinent?" She walked on, and he kept pace with her.

"Is it? Perhaps it is. Would be if you were anyone else. But you're not. You're *you.*"

"Oh!" His intensity was queer, and far more disconcerting than any stare.

"When I saw you in that train," he went on, "you gave me the shock of my life——" He paused, and added, half to himself, wonderingly, "And you were not ravishingly beautiful either. But to-night . . . in that foamy dress. Why, I dared not look at you!"

He stopped again and stood looking down on her. Never could she have imagined him so serious, or herself so perturbed. She simply could not think what to say or do. Instinct deserted her. She must stop this if he was really as serious as he seemed. Ardently she hoped it was just moonlit nonsense.

"Let's finish with this fencing," he pleaded. "I'm

probably behaving like a fool. But I want to tell you, now, this minute, while there is time, that I have fallen in love with you. It sounds ridiculous, but it's true. I have fallen in love with you. I can't tell you why. God knows I didn't want to fall in love with any one. I've put it off and put it off, and avoided it, and now, as a judgment on me, it has come. And it's *you*. D'you see what I mean? That's why Harvey's being concerned makes me so frightened. And yet I know, inside, that you're not his kind. I can only think you don't know what he's like——"

He came to a pause, and Helen, through her bewilderment and agitation, found herself thinking that, for one so monosyllabic, he had become devastatingly verbose. She knew, too, that if there was any dominating aspect of what he was saying it was the sincerity of it. He almost glowed. And it was the last kind of sincerity she wanted to meet.

"Do you know what he is like?" he persisted.

"I do," she said, and meant to continue to the effect that he must not talk to her like this. But he carried away her intention in a rush of words:

"Then, in heaven's name, what are you doing here? I know you're not his secretary, because he hasn't the vaguest reason for having one. He's frantic for you, and anybody can see it. Can't you? Of course you can! You're no fool! I've fallen hard for you. There's something about you which gets me—gets me in my

heart, in my mind—in my very soul if I've got one. Are you married?"

He shot the question at her.

"No—but——"

"Good. I can begin without *that* complication."

So he would have begun even if she had been? He was like that, when you considered him. Single-mindedness, and, apparently a great faculty for determination were also in him.

"We'll sit down here," he stated, and they did, she not knowing why, for she had but to refuse and he would have to listen to her protest.

It was an ancient stone bench with a rambler-rose festooning one end of it. It faced the bay, with the height of the garden and the invisible house behind.

He seized her hands.

"You're going to fall in love with me, Helen, my dear. Oh, God! the moonlight in your hair, and in your eyes! You're magnificent! Marvellous!"

And then, before she could stop him, or tell him that this scene must, *must* end, he picked her up, and, holding her tightly against him, passionately kissed her cheeks, her closed eyes, her quivering mouth.

Emotion swayed with a swaying world, and the moon swayed also.

"Don't! Oh, don't! Please!" But his lips closed hers.

Through the tumult of sensation which assailed,

which battered, her mind was clear and cold behind it, far away. She knew that this astonishing being loved her no less than he said and showed, but she knew also that the love he demanded of her he could never have. It belonged to some one else.

And yet he attracted her. The mere fact that his gaze had troubled her made that feasible. Physically he attracted her. His close arms thrilled her; his kisses thrilled her, inexpressibly; but she had no wish to unlock the little door in her heart which kept inviolate the deep, secret places of it.

But, she asked herself, had she the power and the strength to keep that door permanently locked?

"Please!" she managed to say, bending her head. "Please!" And she pushed away from him, her hands against the cold white of his shirt. The little pearl studs in it mirrored tiny moons. They winked at her, opalescent.

"Why should I let you go?" he demanded. "I love you! I love you!"

His arms tightened until she felt she must faint with the pressure of them. He was so strong, and there was no help for her in the night. It besieged her, allying itself with him. . . . The trembling beauty and mystery of it cried aloud in its very silence for love like this.

"No! No! No!" she whispered.

Then, not suddenly, for even he could not be abrupt

at such a moment, he loosed her, although she still lay breathless and shaken in his arms, with the moon shining on her white face.

"I love you," he said again, quietly.

The words awakened her from her daze, and she saw his eyes above her, his head shutting out the moon.

"Don't you want me to love you?" he cried suddenly, and she shook her head.

"You must!"

"I cannot. . . ." She spoke with effort; she had never known such weakness, such tremulous lassitude. Spent she was, emerging from the blinding, whirling storm of his passion into the clear calm of her own unflinching mind.

"Helen! Helen! You cannot? What earthly reason have you to say that?" The pleading anguish of his voice hurt her. She was not angry with him, although perhaps many women in her place might forgivably have been at least that. But she seemed to understand him completely. He was Martin Fayre, and he had fallen in love with her in just the mad, impulsive, passionate way Martin Fayre would. You could not be angry with him.

She implied by her movements that she wanted to be restored to at least the dignity of a place on the bench, and that she had been in his arms through no desire of her own.

"I'm sorry," he said, and then added, "No, I'm noth-

ing of the kind. I'm glad I kissed you. You had to know how I felt about you, and now you know. Don't you?"

"I know—and I did not want to."

He caught her hands.

"Listen! Listen!" she said quickly. "You mustn't think like this about me any more—you must promise me not to—I cannot allow you to love me, because that wouldn't be fair. You're too . . . too nice to hurt, to deceive. And it would be deceiving you to your hurt if I let you think that you . . . you have a chance——"

"Then," he interrupted, "there is some one else?"

She nodded.

He sighed, and it was almost a groan.

"Some one else," he murmured. "Do you know, I thought of that possibility this morning, in the middle of a game of tennis, but somehow it passed out of my mind when I saw you this evening. You took away my breath, and everything else in me, I think. Certainly my hitherto so untouched heart. So there is some one else? You love him very much?"

She nodded again. There was a whimsical sweetness in his voice which she found hard to bear. She wanted to take his head on her breast and comfort him like a child. He was too nice to hurt—she had meant that. He said he had not fallen in love before, and it was easy to believe. But it did not make these minutes easy.

"I love him very much," she said after him.

"Where is he?"

He misinterpreted her hesitation.

"Forgive me. I ought not to question you."

"It isn't that I mind that. When you ask me 'Where is he?' I can't answer except to say I don't know."

"You're in love with a man, and you don't know where he is!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord!"

"Oh, I can't explain. One day, perhaps, I will. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime, it seems to me, we've reached a proper understanding. You've warned me I have a rival, which was very honest and—and Helenish, if you see what I mean."

"I don't, quite. I haven't exactly warned you. I've asked you to promise——"

"Oh, I know. But you can't forbid me to remain desperately in love with you. As I say, you've told me the position. It's my own funeral if I decide to risk an ultimate failure. And I have decided to."

"But, Mr. Fayre——"

"*Martin,* for heaven's sake!" he said sharply. "Can't call me anything else after my kissing you. Don't forget *that.*"

"I must forget it. I want to."

"Good! That will be something for me to get on with."

"What will?"

"Reminding you about it on every possible occasion, Helen darling."

She had to laugh. You couldn't do anything else with the aggravating boyishness of his mood. His cheerfulness in the face of adversity was quite as difficult to fight against as the sincerity with which he had headed for it.

"Oh, dear!" she said.

"That's a good omen, anyway."

"You're dreadful! I was sighing at your pigheadedness.

"Yes, adorable one. May I kiss you again?"

"No!"

And he did not, almost to her disappointment, for if he had disobeyed her she could have dismissed him, summarily, and made things so much simpler than the future promised to allow them to be. Life seemed always and always more complicated! First Harvey's increasing ardor and dissatisfaction with his progress; and now Martin Fayre's violent declaration, with its sequel, which threatened to place further responsibility on her shoulders.

Oh, well! These things had to be borne. It was no good worrying. She wished Martin wasn't so terribly attractive; if she could only escape that insistent fact, and its effect on her physically, she felt she might more satisfactorily deal with him.

His face brooded in the moonlight.

Then, as he was about to say something, of which the importance, to him, was manifest in the quick gesture with which he turned to her, a call came through the silence from the villa behind them.

"Fayre!"

It was Harvey's voice.

"Table up, Fayre! You take my place!"

"Coming!" replied Martin, and added under his breath, "Blast!"

Helen saw danger in the fact that Harvey would be at a loose end. Inevitably he would come down to her. Martin sensed her sudden disquiet.

"Thank God it isn't that brute Harvey," he said, by which she assumed he referred to the "some one else." He bent and kissed first one hand and then the other.

"Perhaps I shall not get a chance of seeing you alone again to-night." He was all seriousness now. "Good night, darling. I'll see you to-morrow. And, for God's sake, be careful of the dear Gerald! Promise me that, if you can promise me nothing else!"

"I promise," she said, and smiled up at him. "And, Martin. You'd make me happy if you could decide *not* to run 'the risk of ultimate failure.'"

He shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, "can't do that," and walked toward the steps leading to the upper terraces, where he disappeared.

He met his host half-way up. Helen heard them

talking a moment, and then Harvey's footsteps as he came down the path in her direction. There was an unusual decision in the sound, as if the man had made up his mind about something.

She was in no mood to see him; to have to circumvent his importunities. Martin's love-making and the certainty that there would be more of it, had given her lots to think about.

Leaving the seat, she went quickly and silently along the terrace, and in a moment was hidden from the path by a clump of bamboo. It was very dark in the shadow, and she had to pick her way carefully. Presently she came to a wall which went up and down the hillside in great steps, with a little path running under it. She followed it downward some four terraces to another, much smaller wall which cut into the big one at right angles and formed the lower boundary of Harvey's domain.

The scent of many roses drifted over it, and Helen knew that she was standing within fifty yards of the Villa Silencia, and that she was looking into its garden.

She heard Harvey calling her name, and that the silent peace of the moment should be broken by his voice, of all other possible sounds, seemed significant—because she realized she must listen to it.

But not now.

The next moment she was poised on the top of the wall. The terrace was a low one—a scramble, and she

was standing below it, her heart beating with excitement. She would explore, with no risk since the villa was empty, and, by wandering in his garden, perhaps feel a little nearer him.

She went forward over ground which did not shelve as much as the higher parts of the hill, which here paused on its descent to the sea, permitting an almost level garden as a setting for the Villa Silencia.

To-night its name was apt indeed, and the stillness about her seemed even more definite and complete than in the garden above. *He* had walked along these paths, under this long, perfume-laden pergola, and under just such another moon, perhaps. She held her breath and went soundlessly, not daring to intrude her presence by so much as a footfall. That perfect serenity was not hers to break. Perhaps . . . one day . . .

She shut out the thought. It was easy, so easy, to dream . . .

Quite unexpectedly she came out of the pergola into a small open space by the side of the villa itself, where a wide, arched veranda linked it to the garden. Long curves of moonlight lay on the smooth tiles of its floor, and the wall of the house was no more than a curtain of black velvet, unbroken, shrouding and veiling the details of window and door as completely as the master of it was hidden from her by the gulfs of space.

She stood for a moment in the open, wondering whether she would make a circuit of the building. This

was the side. The front would be facing seaward, round the corner. But she never made up her mind.

In one touch of seeming magic the black curtain was pierced and the gulf of space was crossed.

A light sprang up so suddenly that she had to repress a cry, and two French windows stood out brightly in the strip of darkness. Shafts of light actually fell on her, and she stepped hurriedly into the concealment of a thick gardenia-bush. She watched the windows, with her heart throbbing so wildly that she thought it would choke her.

She could see into the room. It was lined from floor to ceiling with books, and a smoothly curving marble mantelpiece shone over a deep fireplace. There were large, leather-covered easy-chairs.

A man passed from the door across the first window, disappeared for a moment, and then came, like a figure into a picture, into the field of the second.

He took off a light travelling overcoat and dropped it over a chair, stretched his arms with a gesture of mingled relief and weariness, and, as if in need of fresh air, stepped toward the double windows and flung them open.

Helen, trembling, recognized him; recognized the set of the head on the shoulders, the profile of his strong face; recognized him as she had so often visualized him, and, turning, fled back in panic and exultation to the boundary wall.

CHAPTER VII

THE FATES SPIN

I

She was thankful for one mercy that eventful evening. Harvey had given up the search for her in the garden, and he was in the drawing-room with the others when she reached it. She had been spared a scene with him. She faced the party reluctantly. She wanted to be alone, to give herself up to the realization that Fabian Knight was in Rapaccio, close to her; which she could not do when she had to talk to people and keep the joy out of her voice and from her eyes.

Martin knew she had avoided Harvey; she saw it in the quick, pleased glance he gave her when she came into the room. Probably Harvey had not been able to conceal his vexation. He was inclined to be obvious sometimes, in spite of his careful suavity. She thought, too, that he was favoring Martin with suspicion. There was a change in his attitude toward the young man.

Mrs. Anstruther had a headache and asked to be excused. It would not stop the game, since there would still be a four. Helen seized her opportunity, and said good-night, too, thus escaping to the haven of her room, where she could think and dream to her heart's content.

The Pilks cheerfully settled down to another hour's bridge, but both Harvey and Martin Fayre all but showed reluctance. They were both disappointed at Helen's retirement. Harvey wanted another and more successful opportunity of seeing her alone, and Martin, if he could not expect that, felt at least that he might have enjoyed the pleasure of looking at her.

The two played against the Pilks, and lost to them.

II

It was ten o'clock next morning before Harvey found himself alone with his secretary for almost the first time since their arrival in Italy. Indeed, it was many days since he had exchanged two words with her even vaguely relating to the subject which was always uppermost in his mind.

They were walking down one of the cobbled paths —*salitas* every one called them—toward the campus of the Tennis Club. Helen wore a straight little white frock and a shady white felt hat with a curly brim, and she pinned a yellow rose to her shoulder.

"I missed you in the garden last night," he said, after a pause in their conversation, a pause she knew was to usher in a more important topic. "Where did you get to? I mean when Fayre came in after the first rubber?"

"I wandered off and explored," she confessed, and

he saw her eyes smiling provocatively at him for a moment. They startled him a little.

He was an insensitive man, but he realized she was somehow different this morning. A subdued but vivid effervescence of spirit made itself felt rather than seen, and that smile? Was she becoming coquettish?

He did not know that she was possessed of a new strength and a sense of serenity which had not been there before. The excitement of last night had grown into a feeling that her adventure was showing signs of triumph and justification. The problem of Harvey was always there, but she was conscious of an increased power to deal with it. She was, for one thing, less frightened of him. In the sunlight, out here in the open, where he could not make love to her save in words, he seemed an ordinary, rather stupid man, blundering inartistically among emotions he knew little about. After all, his vast and unsavory experience had been in one direction only, and that an unsubtle one. Pursuit, conquest, and possession. And then all over again with some one else.

She knew, instinctively, that of the three stages the first was really his greatest pleasure. The second led too quickly to the third, and the third brought the cycle to an end.

And so she smiled at him provocatively under her white hat, and he understood that if he had found her

in the garden she would not have wanted to go a-wandering.

"That fellow Fayre," he began frowning. "You mustn't take him too seriously, you know. He's a gay dog with the women."

"Oh?" said Helen, surprised, and then, "I shall know what to expect, shan't I? I mean, I won't attach too much importance to what he says—and does."

It was Harvey's turn to say, "Oh!"

"He has been saying things to you, has he? And doing things?"

She smiled again, this time enigmatically, and left him to follow his suspicions of whatever imagination he had. She felt that it was better that he should go uninformed on the subject of Martin's impulsiveness, and thus have something else to think about. Of course, it would make him all the more eager, but it made her own position correspondingly stronger.

"I'm more or less your guardian out here, you know," he said after a moment, meaning that it was his right to demand confidence. She purposely misread the implication, however, and remarked:

"I'm always forgetting you are my Uncle Gerald."

"And so you ought! I'm not! I explained *that* in England!"

There was no point in making him irritated, so she dropped the matter and proceeded to heal the scratches with flattery.

"When does one dance—and where, Gerald? I'm longing to dance with you again."

"I was going to suggest it." His voice was gratified. "We might go to Pontenero's to-night after dinner. Just you and I, eh, little one? We'll leave Christabel at home. She doesn't dance, of course, and, anyway, chaperons are as dead out here as they are at home."

"Pontenero's? What a romantic-sounding place."

"You can see it from here. Look. That flat-roofed building beyond the station—where the palms begin. They are on the terrace which runs along the shore. The sea will be calm to-night, with a moon shining on it."

She slipped her fingers into his for a moment, and pressed them happily without saying anything.

Gerald Harvey squared his shoulders.

The tennis-courts were beginning to fill up. Four were already in play, and men and women in white were talking and laughing in groups by the club-house, a luxurious place. Helen saw Martin Fayre's tall figure as soon as she reached the gate. He must have caught an early train to be here at this hour, she thought, and wondered whether he ever stayed at home in his castle with his neglected friends. Some of these were with him now, however. They were younger and more of the world than the general run of Rapaccio people.

Three pretty girls—really pretty girls—were talking to him.

"There he is," said Harvey, in his tone suggesting also "And at it again!"

But no one could have accused Martin of looking as if he liked those particular young women any more than he liked the pillars which supported the roof of the club-house veranda. At the sight of Helen and Harvey he sprang away from the three damsels and came bounding to meet the newcomers like an agile and enthusiastic greyhound. Had he possessed a tail, Helen felt, he would have thumped the ground with it.

"Ah! You've come! Meant to ask you last night. Those Pilks put it out of my mind. Got a four all ready for you. C'm on, Helen! Let me introduce . . ."

He rattled off several names, none of which Helen caught, and said, "Got a racquet?"

"I'm going to buy one from the secretary now," she told him, and found herself swept into the office, where dozens of racquets were thrust into her hand for her to try their various weights and balances. She chose one and paid for it. It was two months since she had held one, and the feel of it was good to her. She had played at school with some keenness, and afterward, during the summers, had belonged to the Bedford Park Club. Last August she had reached the semi-finals of a local tournament, so probably she would get

along fairly well here, although these people played year in and year out, and ought to be good.

Her "four" went on to a court; Martin, Harvey, and one of the pretty girls, who had seemed rather put out at the sight of Martin's enthusiasm for Helen.

The men spun for partners, and Martin got Helen. As they walked to the other end of the court he began:

"I can always spin rough when I want to. Another lucky day, perhaps? Well, dearest heart—how did you sleep?"

"Untroubled by dreams of Martin Fayre," she said. "Right or left court?"

"If you give me choice so politely, may I say left? And add that from that side I shall see your left profile, which, oddly enough, is a little more beautiful than the right. I assure you," he went on in mock haste—"I assure you the difference is slight—very slight."

Then he became monosyllabic again, and returned Harvey's first service, which came in hard after a double-fault to Helen, with a drive of smashing strength.

"*Wham!*" he said. "My lucky day!"

She thought he looked more handsome than ever in flannels; his shirt open at his bronzed neck and his crisp, black hair moulded to a head a sculptor would have admired. He was lithe, clean, masculine youth incarnate. He played a graceful game, moving quickly and effort-

lessly from stroke to stroke, making few mistakes. A thoroughly attractive person.

She found that she played better tennis than Harvey's partner, and Martin's occasional "Good shot!" or "Oh, *nicely!*" were pleasant comments to hear.

"Will you play in the mixed doubles with me in the tournament next week?" he asked her, and she accepted. The set came to an end with a quick victory for them, and they vacated the court in favor of a waiting 'four.'

Lying back in a deck chair in the sun, the warm breeze fanning her cheek, she had a sudden vision of the existence she had escaped: the world of carpets and crowded Tubes; of soot and gloom, black, wet pavements and squelching boots; of tired, grey faces and weariness. How lucky she was! And even luckier than the people about her, for they seemingly had never worked at poorly paid and uncongenial tasks, and so had no sense of contrast to show them the true delight of such a day as this. They followed the sun and the paths of comfort, played bridge and tennis, and played at life occasionally in between whiles. Cheery, pleasant, narrow souls; to be an amiable acquaintance of as many amiable people as possible seemed to be the ambition of each one of them.

Then she looked up, and saw Fabian Knight. Her heart missed a beat; she closed her eyes and opened them again.

He was strolling through the gateway, bare-headed,

a wire-haired terrier at his heels. He wore a soft grey suit, and strode easily, his head slightly on one side, as though he was considering a delicate problem. She discovered later that this was a characteristic mannerism, one of several. Now she noticed it, and rather liked it. She knew not why.

But of these small things she was barely conscious in the greater realization that this was the man she loved who walked toward her, not knowing that she was there, unaware even of her existence. He moved like any other man; looked, indeed, much the same as the rest of mankind; but there was a strange difference about him which marked him as a being apart, and it lay in no curve or contour of his body or face, but in the invisible essence of the thing people called spirit; personality, perhaps. You might call it a strength, an exudation of power, of bigness, of fineness; but, whatever it was or was named, it seemed difficult to believe that anyone who saw him, who felt his presence, should not instantly recognize it and pay tribute to it. That he happened to be a writer, a successful dramatist, and a public name had nothing to do with it. What he *was* mattered; not what he *did*. If he had been a laborer in the fields, a nobody, she would have had just this same queer, blind, aching desire to put her hand in his and go with him to the end of the world. He came nearer.

"Hullo!" some one exclaimed. "There's Knight!"

There was a general flutter of excitement. They called to him, and he waved his hand in reply. She could see the smile on his face as he came nearer. It was a friendly movement, and it hurt her a little to feel that she was not included in it—was an outsider. Harvey and Martin were on the courts at the moment, in the middle of strenuous sets, and she realized that there was no one else in or near the club-house who was likely to introduce her to him.

He came within three feet of her chair, and stood there exchanging greetings with his friends in blissful ignorance of the emotional turmoil raging on his account in the breast of the girl who lay at ease, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes half-closed against the brightness of the sun.

His dog nuzzled at her knee for a moment, and looked up at her with limpid, intelligent brown eyes. She patted his head, rubbing her finger down his nose. He seemed to grin at her appreciatively, and after a moment returned to the side of his master, who had not realized that the animal had been anywhere else.

She listened to his voice. It was more than a fortnight, and it seemed a year, since she had heard it that night in the Café Corona. Then there had been the chatter of other voices and multitudinous clatterings to obscure it; now she could hear it clearly; examine each cadence, each musical inflection; measure the depth and

strength, the whimsical gentleness of it; and thus learn that if she ever heard it tuned to love-making she would find it irresistible.

"I came a day earlier than I'd arranged," he was saying to somebody. "And missed the connecting train at Ventimiglia because the silly dog got train-sickness or something, and I had to minister to him. Result: I didn't get in till late, and had to rout out the housekeeper on my way from the station, because I'd forgotten to let her know I was coming. She was in bed. This morning she's having her revenge. She's collected the staff, and turned it loose on spring-cleaning. They've driven me out. How's everybody?"

They praised his play, *The Silent Place,* which most of them had seen during their summer visits to England, and he thanked them. He showed none of that bashful super-modesty which Helen always thought so much more conceited than any other attitude. He discussed the play quite seriously for a moment or two, but as though it had been written by some one else.

Then for a few minutes he was left alone. He lit a cigarette and watched the tennis. She thought for a moment that he was going to sit down in one of the deck-chairs close to her, but he remained standing behind her, just out of sight, looking across her still body toward the court. As far as she knew—although, of course, she could not see him—he never glanced at her. If he would only stay there a little while Harvey

and Martin would return and see him. They both knew him; whichever came first would hail him, and in the natural course of things they would introduce him to her. Martin was on Number Two court; and she could see him all the time. What was the score? Ah! He had seen Knight. He was holding his racquet in the air in salutation. He would be certain to come straight to them when the set finished. "Four-five!" said one of his opponents. One game might bring it to an end.

It did. "Game and set! Court up!" cried Martin, and the four went slowly to the bench where they had shed their coats and sweaters. "Oh, hurry, hurry!" urged Helen within. Martin sheathed himself in a white jersey. What a slow-coach the man was!

A short whistle sounded just behind her.

"Come on, Kipps!"

The terrier scampered and barked, and Fabian Knight sauntered toward the gate, and went through it just as Martin reached the chairs.

"Sorry you got left out of that set," he apologized. "Rogerton roped me in last week—before I knew Helen Palmer existed. Old Knight gone? Did anyone introduce you?"

"No," said she. "Have you a cigarette?"

He offered a flat gold case.

"Egyptian, if you don't mind them. Quite mild. You'd like him."

"Who?"

"Fabian Knight. Writer chap. Clever as the deuce."

"Oh?"

But why couldn't Martin have been a little quicker putting on that jersey?

Then she relaxed. Time was young. Fabian Knight was going to stay here for the rest of the winter; it could only be a matter of days before she met him formally. But the urgency of her desire to know him was so difficult to be reasonable with. Her heart was hungry and impatient.

"What *are* you scowling about?" Martin demanded.

"Was I?" she laughed. "I'm sorry."

"Is Gerald worrying you?" He dropped into the chair by her side. "Look here. Tell me how you stand with him. Won't you, please? It's in my mind the whole time. Last night you said you didn't want to hurt me. Well, it is hurting, you know. He *is* such a blighter! I know I'm talking him down behind his back. It's despicable and all that. But I've always hated his attitude toward women. Loathed it! And it would kill me if you—" He stumbled.

"Became one of his 'successes'?"

His concern and perturbation touched her manifestations of the honesty and sincerity of his love.

"Look here," he said sharply. "You understood last night that I want to marry you, didn't you?"

"Oh!"

"That's what I meant, anyhow, but your telling me about this other chap you love muddled me up a bit. See? Now, don't worry. I won't say any more about it. I had a rotten night last night, and I'm jerky this morning. Forgive my crudeness, and all, won't you? I've never proposed before, you know. I'm a bit of a fool."

"You're a dear."

"Ah! You meant it this time!"

"I did. And I think if it wasn't for—I mean if I was—was heart-whole, I'd marry you, Martin. You're sweet, and mad, and amusing. You'd be very good to me—to anyone you loved and married."

It was a funny place to hold a conversation like that, with people all round you, in a blazing sunshine which allowed your face no concealment.

"Here's the ogre looking for his princess," said Martin warningly.

Harvey came up, frowning a little at finding them so engrossed.

"Ah," said Martin. "What about some bridge to-night?"

"No." Harvey's voice was brusque. "We're going out. Another time."

"Right."

Helen could see his quiet joy in Harvey's attitude, and it struck her that Martin's attentions might prove an unconscious aid to her where Harvey was concerned.

They were making him uneasy already; and that would mean that he would always be less in command of any situation which might arise with her.

Was that a mercenary way of treating Martin's niceness, she wondered? Oh! It was beastly, having to plot and plan and intrigue like this; to make the unfortunate Martin a wheel in the juggernaut which carried her ambition. How good it would be if you could turn yourself into two people! She'd be able to give one of them to Martin then.

Harvey left them for a moment to speak to a girl who had just come into the club.

"Where are you going to-night?" whispered Martin.

She hesitated. Would it be making use of him? No —not in this instance. She was sure she wanted to dance with him; Harvey's second-rateness seemed to come out on the dance-floor. So——

"Pontenero's, after dinner," she told him.

His eyes thanked her.

"Who is the pretty girl? I've seen her before," he said, turning his head. "Oh, I know. She's the Rogerton girl. Ivy Rogerton. They were out here for a short time last year."

She was a pretty girl. Very dark and slender, with a perfect olive skin and large, slumbering eyes. She was talking to Harvey with evident pleasure, even excitement.

"He must have met her then," added Martin.

The couple turned toward where they were sitting at Harvey's suggestion.

"Miss Rogerton—Miss Palmer. And Martin Fayre. Did you meet him last year?"

"No, I don't think so." The girl's voice was expressive of her darkness and her sleepy eyes.

"Miss Palmer is my secretary. I'm writing a book of essays," vouchsafed Harvey. Helen was almost certain he mentioned deliberately the first of these comparatively unimportant facts, and was watching for the effect.

If it lay in the sudden glance of suspicion and dislike which quickened Ivy Rogerton's deep eyes for a moment he was not disappointed.

"Oh, yes?" said she. "How interesting!"

Helen was aware of a faint, sick feeling. Something unpleasant had obtruded itself at a moment when she was least expecting it—like finding a dead rabbit on a bank of primroses. It was silly and sensitive, of her, but she wanted people, strangers, to like her. And Ivy Rogerton did not, because of Harvey.

CHAPTER VIII

HOPE

PONTENERO'S glittered. Its façade proclaimed its name in letters of blazing electric lights; beyond, along the terrace by the edge of the still sea, festoons of colored lanterns hung between the palm-trees and twinkled in the velvet darkness.

The ballroom, with its wide, polished floor and sides lined with little tables, each illumined by a small lamp, red-shaded, was a scene of light and movement when Helen and her escort came into it. In accordance with instructions sent down by one of Pepeto's underlings before dinner, a table had been reserved for them, and to it they were bowed by Signore Pontenero himself, a smiling, cadaverous Neapolitan with great moustachios. Just like the villain of all adventure books, decided Helen, who noticed that when you went into any public place with Harvey there was always the same ritual, by which his importance in the world was indicated to the onlookers. She was aware of the glances and whispered asides, and of Harvey's enjoyment in the mild sensation he was creating.

Rapaccio had not seen his secretary in an evening frock before, and it was his opinion that she looked

her best in that attire. Where could you find finer, whiter shoulders, where a neck so exquisitely moulded, or a bosom so admirably formed? She was youth, radiant and sparkling and joyous, a companion of whom any man might feel proud. She moved so gracefully across the floor under the eyes of the colony, which was heavily represented to-night. He smiled and nodded, and knew that the tongues were wagging. Perhaps it had been foolish to bring her here without Christabel's chaperonage, but he wanted to have her to himself for a change. He never seemed to get a moment alone with her. Presently, after a few dances, he would take her out on to the terrace.

But if he had counted on having her to himself while they were in the ballroom, he was forced to realize that one couldn't bring a dazzling vision into the midst of a crowd such as English Rapaccio produced at Pontenero's of an evening and expect it to keep away from her.

They had not been at their table three minutes before the people at the next table—a Mr. Marshall, his wife, and an unattached brother-in-law—with whom he had dined once or twice last year, suggested linking up. He could not refuse. The tables were put together, and the brother-in-law, whose name was Robert Landon, ordered a bottle of champagne. It was in Mr. Landon's mind also to ask Helen to dance the next dance with him on the strength of it, but in that he was forestalled

by Harvey, who claimed it in spite of the convention which demanded that he should have danced first with Mrs. Marshall.

The band played a fox-trot, a trifle indifferently, Helen thought. It was a tune which had been popular in England two years ago. She followed Harvey's rather cumbersome efforts to be light on his feet, efforts which caused him to hop too much. He held her tightly, his arm well round her waist.

"These Marshalls are tedious people," he told her. "And that chap Landon has more leisure than brains. He lives on Marshall most of the year. Sorry! Did I hurt you? My feet are too big, you know."

She contradicted him politely.

"You're the 'belle of the ball,' my little Helen. I like to be seen about with you. You're enjoying your first taste of this Italy?"

"I am, Gerald. I adore it. People are so kind, so nice to me."

"Too damned nice!" he muttered, or something to that effect.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. I mean—so they ought to be."

He was silent for another round of the floor. She wished he wouldn't hold her like that. She could scarcely breathe sometimes, and there was no thrill in being so close to him.

The dance came to an end after an encore, and they

went back to the Marshalls. Martin Fayre was sitting with them, and making himself agreeable to Mrs. Marshall.

"That chap again!" Harvey swore softly under his breath. Fayre was obviously preparing to spend as much time as possible with Helen. It was a new departure for one who had said so often that women made little difference in his young life!

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" said Martin, as his eyes fell on Helen in a flame-colored dress.

"Fatuous ass!" thought Harvey, but he did not like the ready smile with which she greeted the fatuous ass.

"I'm on my own to-night," Martin stated. "Privateer under full sail, in fact."

Harvey would have liked to suggest that he weigh anchor and sail away somewhere else.

"Ah, a tango," cried Martin, and looked at Helen. Harvey shrugged his mental shoulders, and Robert Landon chewed the bit of impatience. He hated the tango, because he could not dance it.

"Shall we?" Martin asked of her, and she thanked him and rose.

It was during that tango that she learnt just how attractive he was to her. To begin with, he danced divinely—better, indeed, than anyone she had ever danced with. Then it was one of those insistent melodies, with an undercurrent of throbbing passion in it which on the least significant occasion would have af-

fected her. The orchestra might fall down hopelessly over antiquated fox-trots, but in music of this kind they were in their natural temperamental element. They put their Latin souls into it.

And Rapaccio, because the men never danced a tango save with reluctance, watched with frank admiration while Martin Fayre and that secretary girl, on an almost deserted floor, performed those subtle evolutions which are peculiarly and beautifully the tango's own.

Helen was scarcely aware of the attention they had drawn, for she had given herself up to the music and movement. She felt that everything, from the man to the moment, was exactly right and perfect. Even her frock was the right color—deep flame-red; and the right cut, for it was tight of bodice and full and flaring of skirt. Her shoes were gold, and her stockings, on which she had expended twenty-five shillings, were the best she had ever worn. She seemed to have reached in the five minutes or so the dance lasted a point in the dreams with which she had so often cheered the dreariness of the old life. It was warm; the rhythm was part of her; the sea, glimpsed every now and then through the open doors, was a southern sea, and the stars of the north.

Martin said not a word from start to finish. Even at the end, when the music died, and those who had been watching clapped appreciation, he did not thank her conventionally for the dance. He took her back to

Harvey and the others, held her chair ready for her to sit down, and then whispered in her ear that he loved her.

A moment before she might have heard it and been touched and troubled by it, but now it went unheeded. Of course, he did not expect her to make any sign of having heard; she could not, being surrounded by people, and so he did not realize that her whole attention was fixed on the other end of the room, by the entrance.

Fabian Knight was standing there, his tall figure conspicuous among the men and women about him. He was in evening clothes, just as he had been dressed that night in London. He moved forward, and she realized that he had been standing there with his party while she and Martin had been dancing. Had he seen her?

The next moment she saw that he was not with a party at all, for those to whom he had been talking went toward the corner, while he chose a table in the middle.

But he was not alone. Estelle la Rose walked at his side, her beautiful, eager face upturned and smiling. *Estelle la Rose!*

"Good Lord!" said Harvey, so suddenly that Helen looked at him. A queer smile hovered for a moment in the corners of his mouth, and his eyes were bright and keen.

"Whoever is that astoundingly attractive woman with Knight?" asked Robert Landon.

Harvey told him, and Helen heard the name dimly. Her heart, like all her senses, was numb.

They asked her to dance, and she danced. She was introduced to half a dozen men whom Martin brought to the table at different times, and she smiled at them and did not hear their names. Martin, she realized vaguely, was busily engaged in making her the success of the evening, for after that tango everybody wanted to know her.

But her mind was at the other end of the room, with Fabian Knight and Estelle la Rose and the problem they created. Why was the actress in Rapaccio? An idiotic question, to which the obvious answer was, "Because Fabian Knight is here and the woman wants him," a reason she refused to accept until she had explored every alternative. Perhaps she was merely passing through on her way somewhere else? Or he was writing another play, which they must discuss together?

All the while she supposed this or that and avoided the truth her instinct was loud in its claim to have the obvious accepted, and somewhere in her was a strange, insistent determination to allow no one to see the fear which made her knees tremble and her mouth dry. She was gay, so gay! She talked and laughed and danced with a wildness which seemed merely the height of good spirits.

Of them all Martin Fayre was the only one who saw that it was forced and unreal, and it troubled him sorely. He blamed Harvey, without knowing at all what the man could have done to make her like this. He could only suspect, and the moment he began doing that the blackness of his thoughts appalled him. Harvey was such a swine! He sat there grinning, self-important, conceited, and damnably cynical, watching the girl with beady little eyes, mentally undressing her half the time, and the other half telling himself what a devil of a fellow he was—or *had been*, perhaps? Oh, curse it! A great aching gulf separated him, this being called Martin Fayre, from the Helen he loved. He wanted to pick her up and carry her out of the place, away from Harvey's beastly eyes. He would keep her safely in Castello Andora, with the great gates closed against the viciousness of the world, against the lewd seekings of these predatory animals who went by the name of men.

He got up suddenly and stalked out on to the terrace, where he stared at the sea for a minute. Then he went back to the ballroom, a little cooler about the head, but in no happier state of mind, and passed close to Fabian Knight's table. He was sitting alone, his attractive partner having given a dance to some one. He hailed the gloomy young man.

"Hullo, Fayre. I liked that tango of yours. You've got it in your blood. Personally, I believe in the waltz,

but that's probably because I think I can dance it."

Martin sat down in the vacant chair and scowled with unaffected savagery in the direction of Harvey's table. That was one thing about Knight, you could be natural with him.

"Oh!" said the author of *The Silent Place*. "It's like that, is it?"

"Yes, damn it. At least, it's Gerald Harvey."

"A designing fellow."

"That's a lot too polite."

"I don't know him very well, you see," said Knight apologetically. "If I knew him better I might express a dislike of him more suited to your mood."

"For heaven's sake, don't make *jokes*," cried Martin. "He's after that girl——"

"Which girl? There are usually several, aren't there?"

"Helen—the one I did that tango with."

"She has a beautiful body."

"She has, hasn't she? She's beautiful inside too."

Fabian Knight regarded his friend with sympathetic eyes.

"You've fallen, Martin Fayre?"

He nodded grimly, and at that moment Helen, dancing with Harvey, passed. Fabian Knight looked at her, and said:

"She seems happy enough with him. Doesn't she realize?"

"That's the queer part of it, she does."

"Women are queer creatures, and that's the secret of it," he said, and sighed. Then he added, "Will you introduce me to your Helen? I'd like to dance with her."

"Of course."

"A waltz, perhaps. You might look after Miss la Rose for me during that dance."

"La Rose? Why, she was your leading lady, wasn't she? She's a gorgeous-looking person."

Fabian Knight made no comment. The dance had just finished, and the couples were leaving the floor.

Martin Fayre was introduced to Estelle La Rose, and he found that her attractiveness was of the nature which became less and less the nearer you got to her. He was not particularly expert in such matters, but he put it down to a nebulous state which he termed "lack of sex." She did not stir him at all.

He asked for the next waltz, and was promised it. She also had admired the tango.

He nodded to Fabian Knight when he left them, from which it was to be understood that "his Helen" should be asked for the waltz on Knight's behalf.

Harvey was saying when he got back:

"You ought to see the sea from this terrace, Helen, really you ought—let me take you now. The air after the fug of this room——"

"After the next dance, Gerald——" How insistent

he was! She didn't want to see the sea at all if it was to be in his company.

The lights went dim, and the opening bars of the waltz *Always* filtered through the hum of voices.

"May I, in that case, have this——" Harvey began, but Martin cut into his sentence with:

"Helen, Fabian Knight asked me if you would dance this waltz with him?"

What? What had Martin said? She flushed crimson, and thanked her stars the lights were low.

"I should like to," she said in a small, quiet voice, and at the same moment saw Fabian Knight coming toward her. At last! At last!

It was as though she had suddenly been able to run half-way up a ladder in a single spurt.

She stood up. Her hair felt untidy, her frock crushed, and why was she smiling at him so idiotically? Her back was toward Harvey's indignant face, and the look of anger which he shot at Martin went unseen.

Then Fabian Knight took her politely in his arms . . .

Happiness! The magic of his touch, of his nearness! She trembled at first, and felt she was spoiling the dance for him; then she recovered a little composure and was able to pay attention to the music and the floor. She followed his waltz with the ease of an accomplished dancer. He was so sure and definite and confident—

three essential characteristics of the good dancer.

She gave herself up to his guidance, and they drifted effortlessly through the length of the two encores. They did not speak. Helen could not have found anything to say even had she wanted to talk, and he was silent because it was his habit to do one thing at a time; you cannot make conversation and dance also.

If he thought personally about the girl in his arms he gave her no sign of it; his attitude toward her was detached. She asked herself why he had wanted to dance with her, and could not believe that it was because he had been attracted by her. That was too much to hope. Martin had brought the message asking for the waltz. Had Fabian Knight suggested it, or had Martin himself, who seemed bent upon keeping her away from Harvey as much as possible? She could not know until later, when she would get the truth out of Martin.

How silly to worry about anything when she could enjoy the supremely triumphant fact that she was dancing with the man she loved! Every sense was alive and receptive, so that the slightest pressure of his arm was a thrill. Her hair touched his shoulder. Could he help but feel the beating of her heart? The undulating rhythm of the dance became a part of her.

The last wailing chords of the violins died, and she found herself standing apart from him, her waist still sentient of his hold. He was looking at her gravely, and her eyes fell before his. She dared not face him,

for the moment had not come. He was saying something to her, and his low voice seemed to go through her.

"I never knew there was such dancing. Perfect!"

He turned to take her back to her table, and she walked by his side among the scattering dancers. His curiosity about her was awakened—she was sure of it. Without seeing his eyes, she knew they were observing her.

"Thank you very much indeed," he said.

"And thank you." She found words at last. "I think a good waltz is the most wonderful dance of them all. The tango is wonderful too, but in a different way. I can't explain it, but I expect you know what I mean."

"I can guess, perhaps, but I'm no good at the tango."

Trivialities! The chatter of every ballroom in the world! How ridiculous it was, when her soul was afire with a wonder she would have given the world to express!

"Extraordinarily vital," Fabian Knight was thinking. "I can see what has caught poor Fayre. I've never seen anything like it. Stimulating to a degree. She must be something very new in Harvey's procession." Fayre was quite right to be indignant, he considered, but at the same time he could not quite understand how a woman with the intelligence she obviously possessed had come to put herself in a position where Harvey might annoy her. It struck him, as he thanked

her again, and saw Harvey's sulky mouth, that she was one of those people who could look after themselves. Harvey would have to play his part with unusual subtlety if he were to succeed.

He remembered Estelle, and went thoughtfully back to her.

Helen shivered as she came back to earth. She had a long way to go.

Harvey broke into her thoughts.

"How about a turn on the terrace now?" His tone was almost a command.

He could not have chosen a worse moment to suggest it. After Fabian Knight? It would be unbearable.

"No" she said, and then, remembering how careful she must be, looked and saw anger spring into his eyes. He was on the point of losing his patience. He had been put off too often. She held her breath like a swimmer about to plunge into icy water, and instantly contradicted herself.

"Yes, Gerald. Why not?"

They passed close to Fabian Knight's table on their way to the open doors and the twinkling lights of the terrace.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST INTIMATION

They came to the wall which separated the terrace from the narrow strip of flat, sandy beach, Harvey with his hand inside her arm and his voice full of reproach.

"I thought I should never get you to myself, little Helen. All those men! You're too pleasing to the eye, that's the trouble! Fayre is making himself perfectly ridiculous. What does it feel like? I know you can't help it, my dear, but don't forget me, will you?"

"I could never do that," she said, looking out across the tranquil sea, a plain of luminous purple under the starlight. Far away the misty white glow of a rising moon marked the horizon.

"You're sure?" Harvey asked, and looked casually behind him. The nearest lights were some distance off, and the palms screened the ballroom doors. "Because, you know—you witch—I'm mad for love of you!"

He caught her suddenly, bending her backward into one arm, and pinning her hands with the other. She kept her mouth set, and closed her eyes. He was going to kiss her, and she must not show how she hated it.

"Yes—for love of you!" he whispered in her ear, and kissed it . . . then her neck and throat. "You divine

girl! I've watched you, watched you these last weeks, until I know every curve of you. Every movement of your seductive body! I want you! D'you hear! *Want you!*"

She struggled against his marauding lips, which had kissed the mouths of so many women.

"Oh! You frighten me!"

She was weaker than she thought. Although he revolted her physically, she could not resist him with the power of body and will which she had always counted upon against such a moment as this. Perhaps it was because it came so soon after the dance with Fabian Knight, which had stirred her and left her with emotions which did not tend to strengthen her.

He kissed her, and, with all her sophistication, she had not been kissed like that before. It was beastly! Now, when she cried again that he frightened her, it was with genuine fear.

He realized it, and for a moment she was aware of his fierce satisfaction. Pursuit and conquest . . . he was close upon his quarry.

"Silly one!" he laughed. "Silly one! Frightened of me? I would do you no harm. I want to love you, that's all. Come! Kiss me! Kiss me—give yourself——"

He kissed her again savagely, and she lay so quietly he thought for a moment that she had fainted. He lifted her head. Her face was very white.

"Helen!"

She moved, and sat upright, half on his knee and half on the wall. And then sobbed. She could not help it. . . .

She could not speak for a moment. She put her hand to her bruised mouth, and looked at him. His face was shiny with perspiration. The stars shone on it . . . a wild animal's. . . . He was breathing quickly, and she could feel his desire.

"No," she said weakly. "No! No!"

"I want you!"

The third time he had said that. He meant it. All his smooth suavity had disappeared.

She gathered her strength and pushed him away. If he kissed her again she would scream. He resisted her efforts toward freedom for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders. Passion waned, and there was a long pause in which Helen regained her breath and her wits.

"I don't understand," she said. She put perplexity into her voice. "You want—want to marry me?"

She would have laughed any other time at the way his ardent expression gave place to a momentary flash of panic. He recovered himself.

"Love, my dear, has no voice in marriage. I love you too much to marry you. Can you conceive a more dreadful anticlimax to love than its slow drooping into a kind of lukewarm affection? For passion—passion

such as mine for you—is too fierce to live. It's like a gale—a storm—it rises to a height, an incredible height of turmoil, but eventually it must expend itself. No, my darling, I want you too much to marry you. I would not inflict myself on you to that extent——"

His tones became a trifle self-righteous as he reached this thought. It hinted at sacrifice. Another, less conscientious man, it tacitly suggested, would have married her, careless of any dwindling on the part of passion. He was convincing, plausible, patently "doing the right thing," and she imagined that he had used these arguments before. With many women they would be effective. The simplicity of his strategy made it all the more cunning; he approached through a stimulation of physical sensation, and then, when the woman was so wrought up that she could think only with her emotions, he would present her with these so adequate reasons why his desire for her should be gratified; but his sense of responsibility remained untaxed. Any lingering regret Helen may have felt for the way she had made use of him disappeared in those few moments after his attack. He would never again find her unprepared. She pretended to debate his words.

"You mean that passion is a passing thing? I always thought—but of course I don't know very much about these things—that it was more like a plant which flowers from time to time, and that the later blossoms are often more beautiful than the first."

"That's a pleasing sentiment, but I'm afraid, very much afraid, that it's—well, schoolgirlish, Helen. I'm a man of the world, my dear, and I've seen a great deal of this thing called love. It's painted in bright colors by people who wish, for reasons of pride, to hide its real drabness from the rest of the world. Poets are largely responsible, and they, of all the different sections of the community, ought to be trusted least. They live for the most part in a state of self-hypnosis induced by their peculiar minds, which in logic and observation are largely poverty-stricken. People, men *and* women, who have experienced and experimented will agree with my view of these things, which you are too young to have discovered for yourself. But you must let me teach you."

"Yes," she said, with an air of doubt.

He put his arms round her again.

"Don't bother your pretty little head with whys and wherefores. It will only spoil things for you. Give yourself up to being just yourself. Follow your feelings, not your ideas, which have been formed by story-book, romantic superstition. Open your ear to love. Can't you feel it? Like a kind of rising wave—lifting you up into a happiness you haven't known before?"

His hands moved over her. She stirred uneasily. This was enough for the time being.

"I want to think," she said. "I'm sorry if I seem silly—but there you are. Please, Gerald, give me time.

This is all—so new, you know. Please, won't you?"

He was not expected to resist that kind of appeal, which was always a vague promise, and he did not. He laughed, in a tolerant, man-of-the-world way, and set her upon her feet.

"Don't think too much, then, little Helen."

He spoke lightly, and it occurred to her that to have her think too much was indeed the last thing he wanted. He believed, of course, that what thinking she did would not be enough to loosen his hold over her, and it was particularly obvious that he had no intention of allowing her to think matters out unmolested. He would force the physical attack whenever they were alone together.

"Shall we go back?" she suggested, patting her hair. "I'm afraid I'm rather crumpled."

"How selfish of me! But you're not really. One doesn't think of things like that, though, when one is faced with such seductiveness—and you are a little seducer, you know!"

If she was that, what was he? He called her seductive. Well, she probably could be if she put herself out to be. She had a good mind to prove it to herself—and to him. He took her back to the ballroom, and his excellent spirits were bubbling.

Martin Fayre, sitting anxiously with the Marshalls, likened him to a cat that had stolen the cream. The man was all but licking his chops. Helen looked a little

pale, but also remarkably composed. He would have given several thousand pounds to know what had happened on the terrace.

"I think this is our dance," he said to her as she came to the table, and, without giving her a chance to sit down, swept her away. He danced out of time for several bars, scarcely hearing the music. She knew what was troubling him, and she could sense his disquiet.

"Er——" he said, and broke off.

"You said something?"

"No. Oh, damn it, Helen! You're not—not unhappy. Nothing's—er—upset you?"

"No, Martin. What could?"

"Harvey!" he snapped bitterly. "Look here. Will you chuck in your hand here and come over to Andora? You can stay at the Castello perfectly well. There are about forty chaperons of different kinds in it. And then I shan't spend my whole time worrying my head off about your being with that brute——"

"He *is* a brute. But, Martin, I couldn't do that. I'm —I'm earning my living, you see. Besides, what on earth would people say if I suddenly packed up and went to you like that?"

"Why the devil can't you marry me?" he burst out.

"Ssh! Martin! Don't tell everybody——"

She was thinking how nice it would be to be able to go to Andora, out of sight and sound of Harvey. But,

apart from her objection that it would cause scandal, which definitely it would do, she could not leave Rapaccio, because it would also mean leaving Fabian Knight.

"Oh, I know you can't," Martin went on despondently. "But it is such a crying shame when I love you so dreadfully."

That was again a reason why she couldn't go to Andora; the less he saw of her the better really.

"Please, Martin, you mustn't worry about Harvey. I—I learnt to-night that I *can* handle him, for a time at all events. Long enough, anyhow——"

"Long enough—for what?"

There came upon her a sudden impulse to tell this man about Fabian Knight. He could help her there, she was certain, and she needed help so badly. But she couldn't ask him for help which would be against himself. He loved her. How could she say, "I love Fabian Knight. I want to stay here long enough to make him love me?" That would be a cry for aid, all but an actual demand.

"Long enough for what?" he repeated.

"For Harvey to get tired of the chase," she improvised.

"Think he will? Obstinate type, you know."

"Oh, well, we'll see."

And with that he had to be content. She changed the subject.

"I loved that waltz with Mr. Knight. He dances

wonderfully. What made him ask for it? I'd never spoken to him before."

"I sang your praises."

So that was it? She felt a stab of disappointment, which was rendered none the less painful by the fact that Knight himself, dancing with Estelle la Rose, passed close to them. The girl seemed to be clinging to him. Well, why shouldn't she if she loved him? Which she did. Helen searched his face as he turned. He had that characteristic air of thinking hard about something other than what he was doing at the moment. It occurred to her that if he felt about the actress as the actress felt about him he did not look like it. Actually he looked slightly bored, and as though her manner of holding him hampered his dancing.

The disappointment was assuaged.

"He thinks, with me," Martin suddenly observed, "that Harvey is a man for a girl to be careful of."

"What!" said Helen. "Did you talk to him about——"

The anger in her voice startled him. He all but pulled up short in the middle of the reverse turn.

"No. That is—yes. I mean, he thought you looked too nice a girl to be one of Harvey's affairs. Whatever's the matter? Snapping at a chap like that?"

"I'm sorry, Martin." She all but added that she was a little "nervy," but it would have upset him. "It

is only that I naturally don't want everybody commenting on me."

"I'm afraid they do all the same. But then in Rapaccio they chat about every mortal thing they can, and some others which they invent."

"You've heard them talking about me?" It was an unpleasant thought.

"The women speculating, and so on. But you're young, you see, and to the kind of woman you find out here youth is as bad a sin as any on the calendar."

He was trying to comfort her.

So they were "chatting" already, were they? Well, it was part of the price she had to pay.

Midnight came and went, and with it went Fabian Knight, shepherding Estelle la Rose, who wrapped her ermine opera-cloak about her, and left the ballroom as it were a stage. Which, indeed, it had become, for it had not taken the crowd long to discover who she was. It had gone the round of the tables. . . . "The woman with Mr. Knight is Estelle la Rose, my dear. Staying at the Hôtel Royale—that big suite on the first floor right over the sea. They *say* she spends thousands a year on her clothes. You know—she was Doreen in *The Silent Place*. Peroxide? I expect so, although Martin says he's certain it isn't. He danced with her and *looked*. Yes. The roots *always* give it away. A *wonderful* color. I wonder if Fabian is attached?

Monte or Cannes, you'd think, would be more in her line."

And so forth, and so on. Helen was hearing it all about her by eleven o'clock, and it irritated her because, although the colony regarded Fabian Knight as its own particular little social god, the wagging of scandal-mongering tongues inevitably drew him into it. It was true he gave nobody reason to suspect that Estelle la Rose meant anything at all to him, but her brilliance obscured him, and she drew the onlookers' gaze. You felt, also, that she drew it purposely, and in a subtle fashion, redirected it upon the man.

It was unpleasant to watch, and Helen would have suggested an early departure to Harvey but for her hope that Fabian Knight would ask her for another waltz. He did not, however, perhaps because the actress monopolized him. She had only danced twice with other men the whole evening.

At midnight they went, and the tongues no longer wagged in whispers. Helen danced another tango with Martin, but the edge of the evening had worn off; she was tired and despondent. The interlude on the terrace with Harvey, and then the return of her conviction that Estelle la Rose was doing her best to catch Fabian Knight would have submerged anybody's optimism. She suddenly realized that to tumble into bed and sleep was the height of her ambition at the moment. Harvey sat and looked at her, probably studying what he called

her "reactions," with a conceited belief that he knew what they were.

Even dancing with Martin was a bore. He was glum and dispirited too. The half-hour or so after the departure of the two celebrities seemed the longest she had ever spent in an effort to be amused and amusing.

Then, unexpectedly, at half-past twelve, just as Helen had said, "Yes, I think we might go now," Fabian Knight returned. He strolled into the ballroom in a casual, "well, what's happening" kind of way, and if there was one noticeable thing about him it was the fact that he was alone.

"Ha!" said a voice somewhere within earshot of Helen. "The moth without the candle!"

The aptness of the description robbed it of its vulgarity. You saw him now that the shining Estelle was no longer there. Had he come back to show people he had not spent longer than was strictly necessary over escorting Estelle to the Royale?

Helen sat a little straighter in her chair, and smiled at Martin because he was handy and a nice person to smile at in any case. Harvey beckoned the waiter to pay the bill, and she knew she did not want to go just yet.

Fabian Knight stood looking toward their table for a moment, Helen watching out of the corner of her eye. Would he? Why not? Martin was his friend, he

knew Harvey, and he had danced a wonderful waltz with her. She held her breath.

Then he approached, and greeted her before he turned to the two men. That was ordinary politeness, after all. But she could not help feeling that there had been a definite interest in his glance.

"We're just off," said Harvey.

"Things seem to be coming to an end here," he agreed. "Have you a carriage? I was thinking of walking up. It's a gorgeous night. The moon has risen."

Helen spoke quickly.

"Oh, let's walk too, Gerald. I'd love it!" And she did not wait for him to demur. "We'll all go together. You take the same road, don't you, Mr. Knight?"

"Yes. But, Martin, what about your train?"

"Gone. Keep a permanent room at the Melio, you know, in case of such catastrophes."

"But you'll walk up too, won't you?" Helen asked.

"You bet!" he replied cheerfully.

She had expected him to want to, and she sang a psalm of inward triumph. She knew what would happen, and it did.

Within a hundred yards of Pontenero's Harvey and Martin were ten feet in front of Knight and herself. Then she got a stone in her shoe. When it was out the gap had increased. Harvey and Martin strode on,

content to have their mutual suspicion of one another at rest for a while.

She walked in silence, in step with him, and saw how every now and then their shadows, cast by the low moon on the wide road in front, came together whenever the angle of the light altered and mingled.

He was silent also, until: "This is your first Italy?"

"Yes."

"You're finding it as romantic as you hoped?"

"More so. It's—more wonderful than I can express."

He looked down sideways at her. "I'm not walking too fast for you?"

"No. Not a bit——" But every step took her nearer the villa.

"I could walk and walk on a night like this," he said. "I've often thought it would be rather fun to go on all night—at least, say until the first streaks of dawn. Over the hills—up there, where the cypress groves are. It's very dark among them, and the satyrs leap in the shadows—you can feel them—almost, anyway. Do you believe in satyrs?"

"I believe in anything and everything tonight——"

Something in her voice surprised him, for he looked sideways at her again. Could he feel the tenseness and expectancy of her mood?

"You'd believe in those satyrs, then."

"Should I?" She paused.

An impulse urged her to say, "Shall we go and see?"

She imagined a startled *"To-night?"* and then perhaps —agreement. They would go up to the hills and the cypress-trees, in the moonlight, hand in hand. It would be so easy to slip out of her clothes and meet him in his garden. She could be back before daylight, before the household stirred. What wonder to be alone with him in the night, on the top of those frowning hills where the trees shut out the moon.

But she did not say, "Shall we go?" There were so many hard realities to remind her that it was an impossible thought—part of a delicious dreaming. She had spoken to him for the first time scarcely three hours ago; and the flaming figure of Estelle la Rose stood over him, claiming him.

She found herself talking about writing and books and so on. He must have started on the subject. He was asking her what kind of books she liked to read. She answered mechanically, and then:

"You know, it's terrible of me to admit it to you, but I've never read any of your books. I saw your play, and when I asked at the Times Book Club for things by the same author they hadn't got any. You published privately, they told me."

"There are one or two books I wrote for the amusement of my friends and myself. Most of my work is criticism and serious, stuffy articles about art and so forth."

"Has the Rapaccio library got copies of the books?"

"Yes, I think so. But if you like you can get them at the Villa Silencia. Come in some morning, and I'll rout them out for you."

"I will," she said, and thus progressed a little. If walking up the hill-road with him achieved nothing else, it at least produced that vague invitation.

Once his hand touched hers accidentally, and her whole arm thrilled as if a flame was in it. She trembled to think what would happen if he kissed her as Martin had kissed her, or held her in his arms as Harvey had held her. Trembled deliciously. . . .

They reached the iron gates of the Villa Silencia, where Harvey and Martin were waiting in the road.

Fabian Knight talked with them for a moment or so, and went through the gates.

Harvey linked his arm in Helen's.

"It's a sleepy little girl, eh? It's only another fifty yards."

They might have been miles.

Martin came as far as the door of the Villa Passionata, and bade them good-night. She heard him bounding down the road, perhaps to relieve his feelings.

CHAPTER X

TWO LETTERS

NEXT day nothing happened at all. It was as though her fate rested. On the morrow, however, two letters came. Said her mother's:

I hope that by now you have settled down, and that you are not finding such new surroundings awkward or anything. I understand there is a lot of social life, but you must not let that sort of thing interfere with your work after all Mr. Harvey's kindness. We all [she referred, presumably, to the family, but she meant neighbors] consider you a lucky girl indeed. We miss you at home, dear, and your father particularly. He felt a touch of his colitis this morning—this weather is so trying—and he saw Dr. Ruthaven about it. Saw Mrs. Grey yesterday afternoon, and she tells me her boy is doing well in Africa. You remember him, I expect. It must be a relief after the trouble he has been to her through not being able to settle down to anything. Will announced suddenly that if he can't go to Oxford he will go into the Navy, but we are not sure that it would be a good thing for him, since Dr. Ruthaven, who has two sons in it, says the Washington Conference has spoilt it, and it is not the career it used to be. There are too many men and not enough ships. Expect, though, that Will won't be as set on it in a month's time. As you know, he has a different notion every week. The end of it will be, of course, that he will do what his father tells him. Insurance, or something sensible. If he gets this scholarship at Oxford, however, I don't

know what will happen. It will only put off his settling down another four or five years, which of course your father does not want. They had a dreadful argument at lunch about it, and it's so bad for his colitis. Will is so selfish. Well, dear—look after yourself, and write every week, won't you? And give Mr. Harvey our best regards. I hope you are grateful to him for all he has done for you.—Your loving

MOTHER.

Helen folded the letter and slipped it back into the envelope. The sea winked and shimmered under the sun like the train of the day's bridal-gown across the earth. She sat at a little table outside the Palma, a waterside *café* where a considerable number of the colony gathered every morning at noon for *apéritifs* and cocktails. Over her head was spread a gaily striped umbrella, which sprouted mushroomwise through a hole in the middle of the table. Going down into the town with Mrs. Anstruther, they had met the *postino* coming up the hill and had taken their letters from him. The tables of the Palma were filling up. Harvey had left the villa early to play tennis, and was to meet them here.

She ran her forefinger under the flap of the second letter, wondering whom it was from, for the address was in typescript and had been redirected from Bedford Park. The refrain of her mother's letter seemed to be concerned mainly with settling down. When you came to think of it, it was the little woman's object and ambition in life to have everything and everybody dealt with

in an orderly fashion; to have her house, her family, and her friends functioning smoothly along concise and well-determined lines. Nothing must be out of its place; nobody must do anything unexpected or different from what they were supposed or ought to do.

So her father had another of his colitis attacks; they came upon him with increasing malignancy every winter. The English climate did not give him a chance of throwing them off, and yet he would not go abroad into the warmth. Said he could not afford it, and, anyway, these foreigners did everything wrong, and he couldn't stand them. He could have afforded it, really, for in these days travelling was getting cheaper and cheaper.

She saw that her brother was going to take her place at home as the difficult child. The trouble was they had become so used to having her to complain about that her absence had left a space which unconsciously had to be filled. The unfortunate Will, who was just like any other boy of to-day, was beginning to realize what "new generation" meant, and the responsibilities entailed in being of it. He was full of his own notions of what his own life ought to be, and it was inevitable that his ideas on the subject should conflict with those of his parents. Poor Will! She hoped he would get the scholarship, and thus a chance to find his own feet outside the home. She would write to him encouragingly to-night, at the same time as to her mother, to whom she had not yet written. So much

had happened, and there was so much to think about now that her hopes were bringing fulfilment, and promise of the desired end.

"I shall have a mixed vermouth," said Mrs. Anstruther, breaking into Helen's thoughts. "What will you?"

"A sherry, I think." The waiter repeated the order and departed.

"The Marquis of Hullway is going to marry Edwina George!" announced Mrs. Anstruther triumphantly. "I always said he would!" She waved a purple-tinted sheet of notepaper. "Ethel should have guessed! Isn't it exciting to get letters when one is away from town? You never know what has been going on. Most exciting!"

"Yes."

"At home they're just invitations or tradesmen's circulars—not proper, newsy letters. Are yours as thrilling?"

Helen had just opened her second letter, and at the bottom of the typescript sheet had seen the scrawly signature "Marion de Guise."

"This one looks promising. A girl I used to know at school—in fact, she is the greatest friend I have, although we haven't seen each other for five years. We write about once every six months. Last time I heard from her she was just going to get married."

"Marion de Guise? Is she one of the Staffordshire

de Guises? They came over during the French Revolution, and have been there ever since. There was a daughter who married Lord Tewkes last year. It's a small world. Would it be the same girl, I wonder?"

"I don't think so. As far as I remember, her *fiancé* was an architect."

Mrs. Anstruther was disappointed.

"Gerald's late. It's twelve already. Ah, here are our drinks. Which is the mixed vermouth? They look exactly alike."

The waiter smelt at the glasses and settled the problem. Helen began reading Marion's letter. Pity she used a typewriter! It got between you and the writer, somehow. In the first sentence, however, she got down to it with a directness which was characteristic of her.

Helen, my dear, everything has smashed——

Helen read no further for the moment, and laid the letter on her knee. She took a deep breath, as though a sudden pain had run through her. She remembered Marion's queer, practical, romantic attitude toward life, an attitude which had colored all existence with the brightness of an everlasting dawn. As girls at school they had been inseparable, sharing the joys and sorrows, the anticipations and disappointments, of the day's fortune together. Perhaps the significance of what happened in those young times was small, but you

felt keenly, nevertheless, and memory lingered. She would never forget Marion's joyousness, which made light of trouble and carried happiness to high peaks. And now . . . "Everything has smashed. . . ."

She read on.

——yes, everything, and I am all but destroyed. Not quite, although I know I shall never feel the same about things, about life. You remember how keen I was on it? I used to say that one ought to try everything once; to give oneself every chance of learning in order to get the best out of it. Take hold of it! Go forth and adventure! Well, Helen, I thought I had set my feet to the true path, and it seems that I was wrong about it; terribly, desperately, disastrously wrong. Oh, I know I am full of words, and have not even told you yet what all this dark, dark blueness means. A man, of course. And I suppose it always is. But somehow I never expected that *I*, of all people, should crash over one. I thought I was safe. I thought I could fall in love, and out of love, and remain intact; keep my airiness, if you know what I mean, even if I incidentally lost some of the freedom I put such store by.

Now I have lost my airiness and kept a freedom I don't want!

You remember Mortimer? Mortimer Grex, the architect man I introduced you to about six months ago? I think I told you, too, that we were going to get married when he could afford it. He was charming, wasn't he? Or did you think otherwise, and tactfully did not say so, knowing that I was ravingly in love with him and could see no blemish in him? But the blemish was there all right. Heavens, how I loved him! How I love him still, perhaps! I don't know, and I don't care, seeing that it can't make any difference. When

you met him I had been living with him several weeks. Who wouldn't have done the same, caring for him as much as I did. I suppose it was wicked from the point of view of lots of people, but to my way of thinking it would have been far more wicked to deny a passion which was making a mess of us both. He had had a miserable time of it before I found him. His father had died, leaving his mother penniless and an invalid, and what little money he was earning had to go to keep her in comfort and doctors and treatments and things. We fell in love, and, naturally, wanted one another. He could not marry me then. He said, and I think he was right, that it would not have been fair to me. Suppose he died, or something? Suppose his money went entirely? Also, my people would have kicked up the dickens of a row if I had married him. They like money, the poor dears. So I suppose, what with one thing and another, he was right not to marry me. Maybe we were right; he to take me, and I to give myself—— Maybe we were wrong. Who knows? The moral issue in such things is so cloudy, isn't it? One only knows that sometimes it works, and when it does the world shrugs its shoulders and condones. But, if anything misses fire, the worthy ones who have never had to face a similar situation themselves point their sharp fingers and condemn.

So, two or three times a week, I stayed up in town overnight, in his room, the family thinking I was with a girl friend. It was sheer joy in those early days. I lived on the top of the world, and looked down on it and found it a good place. Mortimer was the dearest, tenderest lover a woman ever had. I was secure in the knowledge that we would get married just as soon as it was possible. His mother was getting better, and her expensive radium treatment was no longer necessary. There was more money. Mortimer was doing better

and better in his job, and there was talk of his being sent to Paris to represent his firm. We were all keyed up with excitement. It would be easier in Paris for us, for we should be out of sight of the people we knew. I would get a secretarial job out there, and everything would be comfortable as far as the family was concerned. He got the appointment, and rushed off to get settled so that I could go to him as soon as possible. The parting was the hardest thing I had ever faced, although it was only for a week or so. We wrote every day, but the time dragged slowly. The week or so became six. He was not ready for me yet, and busy, and a suitable *appartement* was difficult to find.

Then, gradually, he wrote shorter letters, less often, and I was worried, fearing something I could not, dared not, define. I urged him to let me come soon. He put me off in a queer, cold way which frightened me to death. I telegraphed, and received no answer. I wrote, and then telegraphed again. Nothing happened. Was he ill? Or what? I could not stand it. I went to Paris, to the hotel where he was staying, and there discovered that I had given myself and all my love and hope to a man who was swiftly forgetting me in another woman's arms. A French girl he had met on the boat going over. I can't remember the awful things I said to him. I suppose I meant them; I suppose he deserved them. I only know I crept back to London, to the family, in a daze which was only half-conscious. I came out of that daze to learn that what I had expected was true. I was going to have a baby.

I have got over the shock of it all, and in four months' time I shall be bringing his child into a world in which there is no place for it. Somehow, if Mortimer had died before he caught the boat-train that day he kissed me for the last time, I should not feel so badly about the baby. I should be glad, actually, that I was preserv-

ing his love in my body; that presently it would lie in my arms, against my breast, and grow up in the shelter of what home I can make for it. Which last is a problem, my dear. The family would have turned me out if I had not turned myself out, so now I am living in a little attic in Bloomsbury, and I take in typing of various kinds, and earn a pound or so a week. It was useless to get a job, you see. I hope that when my time comes I shall have saved enough to see me through. I shall go to Queen Charlotte's Hospital for Women, and afterwards hope for the best—if there is to be an afterwards, which I sometimes hope there will not be. But would you, Helen, come and see me if you can spare a few minutes some evening? I want to see your cheery face, and hear from you that life has been kinder to you. Forgive me this dirge-like letter, but I felt it would be easier to write it all down than to have to tell you when I see you. I'd probably break down and make an ass of myself—a spectacle I have always sworn I would not present to anybody, even to you. . . .

"Whatever's the matter, Helen?" cried Mrs. Anstruther.

"Nothing, nothing!"

The tears were there.

"Not bad news, I hope?"

"No. Just the sun. It's a strain to read in this bright light, isn't it?"

Mrs. Anstruther looked at her anxiously, even suspiciously, and began chatting amiably about nothing in particular. Helen did not hear her. All her thoughts were focused on Marion, alone with her sorrowful disillusion in the Bloomsbury attic. "Come and see

me." But how could she, when she was all these miles away? She could write and say how sorry she was, and feel that she had failed a friend. What a terrible, terrible mess! If only she could *do* something for her—but what? Send her money—yes, she could do that—but Marion wanted some one to look after her. Money would help, and yet how would she accept it? She had not written to beg money. She had written for aid, warm, human aid. And it had been an effort for her to do that, for she was proud and independent. She would always be that, even if her spirit were utterly broken. She was gallantry and courage personified. Helen could imagine the fine strength with which she was trying to face the ordeal of pain and loneliness, of responsibility. What swine some men were! The world became suddenly a dangerous place. She reviewed her own problem, and saw that she, like Marion, had been living dangerously. Joyous adventure, a flying of flags, and a gay march through the pitfalls and over the obstacles —but one false step, one slip, and the flags would fly over empty places, and the gay march end in spiritual death.

"I can't think what has happened to Gerald," said Mrs. Anstruther plaintively. "Surely the set cannot have lasted two and a half hours! Perhaps he has forgotten he said he would meet us here and has gone straight up to the villa. What do you think?"

"Oh—er—yes. Perhaps he has."

"In that case we'd better pay for these drinks and be getting there ourselves. It is almost lunchtime."

Helen agreed automatically, and throughout the walk home, with the sun warm on her back in spite of her protecting parasol, she grieved and puzzled over Marion, whose plight took the brightness out of life. Her own circumstances were so full of promise; it did not seem right, somehow.

The sad letter lay in her pocket side by side with her mother's. How different they were! Her mother's full of worry about nothing, and Marion's full of something about which she might forgivably worry, but did not. Poor, poor thing!"

"I'm going into the garden," she told Mrs. Anstruther when they reached the villa, and she took the path which branched off the main drive. Mrs. Anstruther puffed up to the front door and disappeared through it, while Helen wandered slowly along the terraces, glad to be alone. She must write to Marion after lunch, and, if it could be worked tactfully, send her a draft on London from the Rapaccio bank. There was still lots of money in her letter of credit. She would have to make up some story about having become suddenly rich. Or should she just enclose the cheque without saying anything about it at all, and let Marion assume what she liked? Surely she would understand that between them there could never be any question of debtor and creditor?

It would be difficult; Marion was so stiff-necked in some of her notions.

Unexpectedly a figure came quickly down the steps from the house, and Helen looked up to see the girl she had met at the Tennis Club, the girl who had shown such a definite dislike of her. She was carrying a tennis racquet and a net-bag full of tennis-balls. At the sight of Helen she hesitated, as though undecidedly whether to meet her or not, and then ran on down the steps toward her. Helen, whose head was full of new names, remembered "Rogerton, Ivy Rogerton," in time to greet her.

"Good morning," replied the girl, and her dark eyes shone suddenly, as though a fire had sprung up in them. Helen was wondering what she had been doing in the villa. Had she come up from the Tennis Club with Harvey?

"Is Mr. Harvey back yet?" Helen asked innocently.

"Back? You mean from tennis? Oh, yes. We stopped at eleven, and came up for cool drinks and so on. You weren't playing this morning?"

"No." She wondered what on earth Ivy Rogerton was being so intense about. Why the fierce light in her eyes, and the hissing silkiness of tone? Was she angry, or hating, or what?

"I usually take the short cut from the bottom of the garden——"

"Is there one? I didn't know."

"Didn't you really? Well, I must be going. S'long——"

She went, taking the short cut, and Helen pondering, suddenly realized what had been the matter with her. Triumph, that was all. Just triumph. She no longer hated Harvey's new secretary. She merely scorned and despised her. And she "usually" took the short cut. That spoke of a past.

Helen laughed to herself, but with little amusement in it. Harvey had spent the last two hours successfully convincing Ivy Rogerton that she had nothing to fear. He had probably told her, with a wealth of practical demonstration, that his affections in no degree owed allegiance to his secretary, and the unfortunate young woman had apparently believed him. Helen shrugged her shoulders. You couldn't do anything for her.

She went up to the house, and, entering by the drawing-room, found Harvey there. He was lying back in an armchair, smoking a cigarette and contemplating the blue clouds which passed through a shaft of sunlight. He was surprised and vaguely alarmed by her appearance from the garden.

Helen looked at him, and for once she found that she was able to make him uneasy. Without knowing anything, save her suspicions, she bluffed him into disquiet by glancing at him in a manner which would have conveyed nothing to any one with a clear conscience.

But his wasn't clear, and he realized that the two women had met in the garden, and further guessed that that little fool Ivy had been crowing her victory. It was, of course, an imaginary victory, but he couldn't very well say so, since Helen made no reference whatsoever to any meeting or conversation with Ivy. Indeed, as Helen's would-be lover, the position was invidious. He had been a silly ass to bring Ivy up to the villa at all, but he had felt safe, knowing Helen and his sister were waiting for him at the Palma. He had shooed Ivy out when he heard Mrs. Anstruther in the hall. He had assumed that Helen was with her. Who would have thought she would come round by the garden?

He felt damned uncomfortable.

After that first enigmatical glance Helen had asked him about his tennis, and mentioned that she had heard from home, and so forth. Apparently, if she was going to question him about Ivy at all, she had decided not to begin just now.

He flung his cigarette irritably into the fireplace.

The lunch-gong sounded, and Helen hurried off to wash, reflecting that really Harvey was delicious. He kept giving himself yards and yards of rope for you to hang him with.

CHAPTER XI

A TELEGRAM

MAKING the necessity to write letters her excuse, Helen escaped a walk with Harvey after lunch, and, taking her notepaper and a deck-chair, found a quiet corner of the lower garden. She wrote to her mother first, telling her about Italian housekeeping, the food and servants, and then gave a list of the generals and bishops and people she had met. It was the sort of letter which could—and probably would be—handed round the interested houses in Bedford Park. All the while she was covering paper with these inconsequential details she was thinking about Marion and what she could say to her. It would not be an easy letter.

And that is about all. Give my love to Father, and tell him I am so sorry to hear about his colitis. It is miserable for him. Tell Will I am writing to him soon.

Your affectionate daughter,
HELEN.

She scribbled the address on the envelope and closed it. That was that. She took out Marion's letter, read it through once more, and sat motionless for some

minutes, watching a small brown lizard darting with incredible rapidity up and down and all over the boundary wall, which was within a few feet of where she sat. Fabian Knight's roses were on the other side, warm-scented in the afternoon sunshine. It was peaceful here, above the town, from which the affairs of mankind came up in a diffused murmur of sound made harmonious by distance. In the garden the air moved gently, fresh and clean and sparkling. The world was far away. She felt tranquil and at rest; the problematical future could take care of itself for a space. But her heart was disturbed for Marion, and content and quietude would not stay. Her letter brought the wretchedness of humanity into this sunlit garden, and dulled the beauty of it. Helen knew that it was no more than a trick of circumstance that had determined which of them should be in the Bloomsbury attic. If Marion's so-called "modern" views had brought her to it, were they not practically the identical views she herself held? Marion's people might have been her own, so allied were their prejudices. Helen Palmer might have loved Mortimer Grex instead of John Foster—they represented the same phase. If John had been a little different conceivably she might have given herself to him as Marion had given herself to Grex, with similar results; and if she had not seen Fabian Knight in the Café Corona she might have gone back to John. Although,

recalling her mood that evening, she felt that that would have been unlikely.

The thing called love lay underneath it all. A mad, unreasoning state of affairs which exalted or destroyed whimsically. You could not escape its urge. It drove you along dangerous paths, along the edge of precipices in the dark toward happiness. You might travel those paths unfalteringly, or you might make a false step. You had no means of telling at the outset, or, indeed, at any other point in the journey, what the end might be. Every day, every hour, took you into new perils. She herself sat in security for the moment, full of confidence in the future, but she could not see what lay round the next corner. There was as great a chance of meeting disaster as of finding Paradise.

Gloomy thoughts! She turned away from the despondency which threatened to demoralize her completely, and looked about her, at the flowering bushes and olive-trees golden in the sun. A bird chirped, and fluttered past her feet into the undergrowth. The lizard shot in a little cave and disappeared.

Then she saw Fabian Knight regarding her over the wall with an intent, questioning look. He must have been there several moments before she had become aware of him. She colored. Would she never be prepared when he came? There was a quality of surprise about him which was also strangely placid, making it all the more difficult to combat.

"I am eavesdropping," he admitted but with no hint of apology in his voice. "I saw you from the pergola and came to interrupt your writing. But I arrived to find you scowling in a dreadful manner. You oughtn't to. You haven't the right kind of face, you know. Your eyebrows don't beetle enough, for one thing, and for another your upper-lip isn't sufficiently short. It's that which gives the real scowler his villainous expression. If Martin had seen you like that he would have had a fit. He is a great enthusiast about your looks."

While he talked nonsense he watched her keenly, and she knew he was wondering if Gerald Harvey were the cause of her mood. She did not want him to.

"The chief joy about Martin is his enthusiasm," she said. "Perhaps it is just as well that he didn't see me. But I wasn't scowling in villainy. I was worrying over my letters—a letter."

He smiled sympathetically.

"Awful things, aren't they? The power of the written word is more than most of us can stand. And, when you get down to it, half the letters one gets ought never to have been posted."

"This one had to be, I think." She glanced down at it. "It's what you writers would call a 'human document.'"

"How terrible!" But his eyes were still sympathetic.

"It is."

A sudden impulse to talk to him about Marion came

to her. She felt the need of some one. It would be no betrayal of a confidence; he did not know Marion—never would. His interest would be that of an impersonal expert. People, human nature and its adventures, were his particular concern.

"She is a great friend of mine," she told him, "and has made a mess of things. I want to help her, but I don't quite know how to do it. One is so limited in things like this. At least, I feel *I* am. Would you read it?"

She went to the wall, which was waist-high, and gave him the letter. He took it gravely, and read twice through it, while she watched him a little anxiously. His mouth was set and expressionless. Then he glanced at her.

"No wonder you looked savage," he remarked. "It's the kind of story which makes one hate the world, isn't it?"

"Naturally I must write to her, and try and cheer her up. And whatever I do will seem inadequate. It must always be like that, I suppose."

He nodded, and looked at her curiously.

"She needs money, yes. And more than money. Let's think. Hm . . . she's fine-minded, isn't she? Independent? I gather she hasn't told this man Mortimer Grex about the baby. She wouldn't appeal to him. You see what I mean. I think our only chance to do anything with her is to be a trifle high-handed.

Take it up firmly, you know. How much were you going to send her?"

"Fifty pounds. I couldn't afford more. I must keep twenty or so in case of emergencies."

"You have seventy, and you were going to send her fifty of it. And some people say women don't hang together," he added.

"If you're going down to the town you'll telegraph the money, I suppose. I'll walk with you, if you don't think I'll be in the way."

"In the way! Of course you won't."

They set off together, visiting the bank and the post-office. Helen felt better at having done something for Marion, and to be alone with Fabian Knight was pleasing.

"Shall we walk along the beach toward Lanella?" he suggested.

She agreed. She had often wondered what it would be like to be with him for a period of hours, hoping that he would not find her dreadfully stupid to talk to, and be enormously clever above her head. Companionship, effortless, unstrained companionship, was so necessary. Physically his attraction for her was too strong to doubt; she knew that he would satisfy the passion which lay in her, as yet scarcely awakened; but the other sides of her nature, and his, sides of which she had had more experience, and which she knew to be very important, were still untried. It was hopeless to

believe that an hour's love-making ever so often could compensate one for lack of sympathy and understanding in other things, because it never had and never would.

The walk that afternoon, however, proved conclusively to her that her first belief, gained in her first sight of him by the same subtle intuition, had been right.

It seemed as though he took her straightaway into the inner chambers of his mind, and, although she realized what was happening, he seemed unconscious of it, which worried her a little. She knew that it was a rare experience to enter or be taken into the lonely places of thought, and yet he was unaware of it, perhaps because of the ease and naturalness with which it happened.

She comforted herself with the reflection that one day, quite soon perhaps, he would realize what had happened, and be properly impressed. It would come to him when he was with some one else. He would say something peculiarly Fabianish, and discover that the point of it had been missed, and realize that she would have seen it. Patience! Patience! It was hard preaching, but she must learn it. This slow approach, when the climax of the real meeting could have come at any moment, was infinitely tedious.

So, pretending to herself that he loved her, and had told her so, she talked of a thousand and one things,

the swift flow of thought and idea mingling as though she had been friends for years. Of course, he knew a tremendous lot, and had travelled up and down the world, and spoke sometimes of experiences she could not share except in imagination, but she never had the feeling that he was outside the scope of her understanding. It was an exhilarating sensation.

At half-past four they came to a wayside *caffeteria,* where they had tea, sitting side by side on a wooden bench at an iron table set on a small veranda perched above the black rocks of the shore. No one else was there to disturb them. As she grew accustomed to the ease of being with him she became less diffident about talking about herself, and she found herself telling him about the life she had lived in London.

"This, then, is different?" he said.

"Wholly, utterly. Although I suppose the real difference is not so much in the change of scene and surroundings as in myself. Away from home, and the smell of those beastly carpets, I feel the freedom I always wanted. I am much more myself, more of an individual. You know what I mean?"

"I do. I used to work in an office, once—on a newspaper. When I got away, escaped, I remember the sheer undiluted joy of simply lying in bed in the morning, watching the clock and knowing it could not order me about any more. And the quiet of places! I used to ramble out into the country and lie on my back in

a world where there was no movement except the changing banks of clouds. It was wonderful. Then I used to walk about in the busiest streets, among the scurrying traffic and people just to realize I needn't be there unless I chose to be. A kind of busman conductor's holiday. I didn't have to punch the tickets. I can understand, you see, how glad you are."

He did not say anything about Harvey, or her secretaryship, and she knew he must guess by now that it was an excuse for something, and hoped he thought it merely an escape from the drudgery of the past. He seemed incurious, too, about the price she had to pay for it, almost as though he preferred not to know, wishing to accept her as he found her. In this he was unlike Martin Fayre, who troubled himself continuously about it.

"And one day," said Fabian, "you will get married, like everybody else, and lose this freedom you have looked for so hard."

"When that time comes I shan't mind losing it."

"You mean?"

"I shall find a man for whom I can sacrifice it—exchange it for something even more worth while. Although why marriage need be a slavedom I don't quite see. It seems to me it is one of those things which can be just what you like to make it."

"That's true. It is an unusual view, though, to hear

from a modern woman, which your desire for freedom would indicate you to be."

"I sometimes think the modern woman is a thing of the past. After the War there were lots of girls who discovered that it was quite possible to live like a bachelor, even if you wore a skirt instead of trousers. And they made a great fuss and flurry about the advantage of that kind of life. The really modern woman is beginning to be a great advocate for marriage. The only thing is, she doesn't rush headlong into it in a condition of blind confidence just when her parents care to decide she shall. She looks twice at the proposed bridegroom, and more often than not says, 'Not for me!' But that doesn't mean all men. She'll go on looking for the right man even more energetically."

"You seem to have worked it out with considerable wisdom. Are *you* looking energetically, then?"

"Naturally!"

He laughed, and then eyed her shrewdly.

"You're a dangerous young woman, you know."

"Am I? Are you frightened?"

"Not as yet. But this disarming frankness of yours is something new in my experience. I honestly believe you say what you think."

"Not always. But is it so rare in women?"

"Very." He paused, and added seriously:

"He'll be getting a good bargain in exchange for his bachelorhood."

"The object of my search?"

"Yes. May I have some more tea? Thanks."

He drank, looking out to sea over the edge of the cup, perhaps with the same deep expression in his eyes which she had detected in them over his coffee-cup in the Café Corona. This time she was at his side, and unable to see, but the incident reminded her of the night when she had found him, the man for whom she was searching. Supposing she said, now, without warning, "You are the man." The impulse came, and went. He must discover that she was the woman before she told him. So he thought she would make some one a good wife? It was encouraging in some ways, but in others somewhat dull. She almost wished he thought her the mistress type, for she knew most men were more easily attracted by it, and that he was very much like any other man where women were concerned. If Estelle la Rose attracted him at all, it was from that aspect. Nobody could imagine her as a child-bearer and companion of the hearthside.

Suddenly, however, he contradicted the impression he had given her by remarking:

"When I said you were dangerous I meant you were the kind of woman who could be all things to a man—that is, you'd be whatever he decided you were. Lover or wife, mistress or friend. Or all of them."

She said nothing to that, satisfied with the essential

fact that he was trying to define her as a woman. It was a definite step.

Thereafter the conversation veered into other channels, and throughout the walk back remained in them.

The crowning moment to what she deemed a thoroughly successful and promising afternoon was when they came to the gates of Villa Silencia at about six o'clock and met Estelle la Rose coming out of them.

At the sight of her Fabian Knight exclaimed, half to himself, and under his breath:

"That's torn it! I asked her up to tea! I'd clean forgotten!"

Estelle was in a towering rage, which she tried to conceal behind a set, white face and a motionless smile.

"Ah?" was all she said, and listened to Fabian's excuses. The poor man was at a loss to explain how he had come to forget the arrangement, while Helen stood there a silent but obvious reason to the actress why it was she had spent the afternoon alone and had eaten a solitary tea in the Silencia, in a library ungraced by any Fabian.

"I'll run along now," Helen said to him. "I have that letter to write. Thank you so much for being so good. Some time I'll thank you properly—as you ought to be thanked. Good-bye."

She bowed slightly to Estelle, and went on to the Passionata, enjoying a triumph she knew she

was wicked to feel. Poor Estelle! And poor Fabian!

The door of the Passionata was open, and Pepeto was standing in it arguing with the owner of a donkey about the price of olive-logs that the donkey had brought down from the hills. When he saw her he cried:

"Oh, signorina! A *telegramma* com' for you!"

He snatched the pale yellow envelope from the table in the hall, and presented it to her. She took it and tore it open with the inevitable nervousness a telegram always produces. The premonition was justified.

Father dangerously ill. Come home at once.
MOTHER.

Harvey, sulky, and feeling that she did nothing but slip from between his fingers, but impotent at this hint of tragedy to do anything, took her down to the station in time to catch the evening connection with the Ventimiglia-Calais train.

"Come back as soon as you can, little Helen."

"I don't know when that will be. It will all depend. . . ."

The train shrieked dismally and began to move. She sat at the window and looked up at the lighted windows of the Villa Silencia. The night took them, and the hillsides were dark.

CHAPTER XII

ALARM

Day broke on a grey plain across which the racketing train bore her northward toward the sunless places. She lay back in the corner of the carriage, and stared wearily at France. She had slept little. The *wagon-lit* carriage had been full at Ventimiglia, and she had had to make the best of things in an ordinary compartment in which a fat priest and a very thin Italian woman were already ensconced. She knew, however, that even had she lain in a bed that night she would have slept no more than she had been able in her unsympathetic corner.

An endless night, with no respite from the dreariness of her thoughts.

"I was so happy. In a little while he would have begun to love me. Now that I have left him I may not be able to return. Poor father may die; and mother insist that I stay with her. It may be weeks and weeks before I am free to go away again. Oh, heaven! What's the use of hoping, of loving? I wish I'd never seen him! I thought I was the happiest woman in the world, and now I know I'm the most miserable. Poor father! He must be very ill. . . .

She'll get Fabian now—and I'm not there . . ."

The smiling face of Estelle la Rose mocked her, laughed at her presumption, at her ineffectual efforts to come between her and the man she had decided to annex. Helen remembered his anxiety when the actress had met them together at the gates of his villa. He was not actually afraid of her, but he was one of those men who hated what was called a "scene." He was so poised himself, so determined to have life go smoothly about him, that he would do much for peace. And now that she had leisure to analyze his attitude toward Estelle she saw that he had been to a certain degree protective, as though he was sorry for her, and also nervously eager to please her; which was dangerous in that he might easily take another step forward and fall in love with her.

He might have fallen already. And she could not learn; could not circumvent it, alter it, do anything at all about it, with these lengthening miles separating him from her.

It seemed as though the fairy castle had been razed to the ground in one single stroke.

The moment she succeeded in taking her mind off Fabian and Estelle she began thinking about home and her father's illness. She could picture the silence of the house in Priory Road; the strained, anxious face of her mother, who would be wearing felt slippers in order to make as little noise as possible; her brother's

eager voice reduced to irritated whispers; and Dr. Ruthaven's silver head shining in the dimness of the patient's room. Her father had been ill several times before, not dangerously, like this time, but ill enough to cause anxiety. Poor old chap! What a stupid, miserable pity she hadn't got on better with him! She'd tried. She was sure she had tried her hardest. But somehow the gulf between them, which was so wide because in blood and in everyday existence it was so narrow, had never been bridged. As a little, little girl she had offended his immutable prejudices—before she knew what prejudices were.

She hoped beyond words that he would be still alive when she reached his bedside. Perhaps, miraculously, they would meet and understand one another. The veil of Death in falling might lift the veil Life had drawn between them.

The train sped on. The grey plain seemed no less grey as morning advanced; the sun was buried in thick cloud, and found no way through.

There was one comforting thought. She would see Marion. Perhaps she would arrive in time to be of practical help to her. Thinking of her friend, and the train of ideas set up by that tragedy, the danger of the road down which love led the way, she realized that she had come upon one of the hidden pitfalls she had suspected. Circumstance had flung her into one; cir-

cumstance, if it saw fit, might pull her out again. If it saw fit . . .

Paris, a change of train; Calais, the boat; the smooth, narrow carriage of an English train to Victoria; a taxi in the murk of the great station, and out into the deeper murk of the night. Street lights shining on wet, black roads and pavements. The taxi became one of many, the threepences ticking toward Bedford Park and the house of sickness; the home where she had dreamed so many dreams.

Her mind and heart were fixed upon the still, warm peace of an Italian garden where Fabian was. Perhaps he had wondered why she had left so suddenly—perhaps he hadn't. Perhaps Harvey had told him, and he had been sorry for her. But would he wish, honestly, really wish, she had not had to go? Would he miss her? Would he think of her and remember that walk along the shore? That dance at Pontenero's? What was he doing now? What was he thinking about? About her? No, little fool! About Estelle, of course, who would see to that!

Oh, what was the use?

The taxi ran under the railway bridge at Turnham Green, out again, across the top of Bath Road, and turned into Priory Road. She was near now. In another minute, two minutes, she would be hearing the worst about her father. She had a sudden breath-

less feeling that he was dead. It was one of those premonitions which are born of fear, and, although she told herself it was no more than that, the dread remained. Her mouth was dry.

The taxi went more slowly, the driver peering at the numbers. It was another fifty yards, and the crawling of the cab irritated her. She rapped on the pane, and instantly the brakes jerked it to a standstill.

"No! No! Farther—by the lamp-post there on the left!"

He could not hear. She seized her small suitcase, jumped out, and fumbled in her purse for the fare. The man grunted at her impatience for change for a pound note.

Thirty yards. She walked them quickly, opened the gate, and the ivy clinging to the arch of wrought-iron above it sprinkled her with raindrops. The short gravel path was squelchy under her feet. She opened her handbag for her latchkey, and then remembered she had given it to Will before going to Italy.

Italy! How far away it was!

She rang the bell and waited, noticing that there were no lights. It was late now, and the house lay very quietly.

Footsteps came after an age of waiting, and her father opened the door. He was in his dressing-gown, his thin hair tousled.

He blinked at her, then seized her hand, and drew her into the hall.

"My dear child! You've come! You didn't get our telegram? The second one? Your mother was unnecessarily anxious on my account. That was two days ago. I had a bad night, but later in the day the pain went altogether. Dear me! But I am glad to see you just the same. Your mother is in bed and asleep, and Will isn't in yet, although it's nearly midnight. You're looking tired. And how is Harvey? I hope you weren't too alarmed by your mother's message?"

"I—I was," she said.

"Dear me, what a pity! She's so nervous and precipitate, you know."

"Yes," said Helen.

She laughed suddenly, and he looked at her queerly, thinking it odd that she should find anything to amuse her. But then he had long ago given up trying to understand her.

It came to her with a vague surprise that nothing at home had altered. Measured by the changes which had taken place in herself, veritable stagnation brooded over the house in Priory Road. Even her father's attack of colitis, a matter of the past, was no longer referred to. He had had similar attacks. Her mother seemed to move about her narrow world with the same air of reproach toward anything which was not

established in her preconceived notions concerning it. Toward Helen she adopted the same unvoiced and unformulated suspicion that she had always held. With her husband she was either irritable or resigned, as though he were an unreliable simpleton of whom little sensible was to be expected. Will was the only person in the house she really cared about; and even he came in for his share of her ill-humor.

Helen, aching with impatience to be out of an atmosphere which stifled her more than it had ever done, consented to stay four days before returning to Italy. It was forced upon her that if she departed sooner she would leave amid disapproval.

"What would the Bedford Park people say if you rushed off the moment you're back?" demanded her mother.

It was worse than useless to point out that the Bedford Park people need not be consulted as to their views.

Her mother came to her room before going to bed, and gossiped whole-heartedly for ten minutes without coming to a reason for her visit. Helen knew there must be one. All the signs were there. Finally she reached it.

"I'm glad you've had the sense to break with that man Foster, Helen!"

The antagonistic tone was sufficient to put the girl on her guard.

"Why, how did you discover I had?"

"He called here a week ago——"

"Called *here?*"

"Yes. He wanted to see you. He was extremely rude. I—I—understood you had not told him you were going abroad, and that he had not seen you for quite a while. It surprised me, and I *do* think you might have told me you had decided not to have anything more to do with him. I suppose you were ashamed to admit you had taken my advice."

"I took no one's advice, mother, but my own. I didn't say anything about it, because—well, the subject had always been an unpleasant one at home."

"Hm! I *see!*" Mrs. Palmer's voice was consciously hurt, but she did not at once complain of her daughter's unfilial disregard of her as a *confidante*. She went on, "It put me in a very awkward position. He stood and stormed at me in the hall. He was dreadfully rude. Naturally I refused to say where you were, or anything about your movements. I told him to leave the house."

Helen could picture the righteous pleasure with which the unfortunate John had been dismissed.

"There could have been no harm in your telling him where I was or what I am doing—or that I was in Italy. I expect he has been plaguing the office about me too."

She could imagine John's frantic behavior if he

had decided to search her out and re-establish their relationship. He had waited as long as his false, stubborn pride would let him for her to make a move toward reconciliation, and, when he had no word at all from her, he had swallowed his pride and taken the initiative. Poor John! She had drifted far from him, and she could never turn back, even if—even if she lost Fabian. Her thoughts were interrupted.

"Tell me, Helen, how do you like Mr. Harvey?"

"He's very kind." She knew exactly what her mother was wondering—what she wanted to know. She wanted to hear that there was a "match" in the making. Well, she would have to come out into the open. She did, aften an uncomfortable pause.

"Your father's greatest friend—a man of good family and position. If he—if he should grow fond of you, Helen——"

"What a notion!" she cried, and glanced thoughtfully at her mother. There was something else here. It emerged.

"A short while ago—just before you left—your father had a letter from Mr. Harvey in which he spoke of you very highly, almost as though——"

"As though—what?" How like them not to have mentioned the letter before!

"Well, we—your father and I—thought he might be thinking of—er—perhaps asking you to marry him."

"The last thing he would ever do!"

Her mother stuck to the guns of hope, however.

"If he did ask you you'd accept him, wouldn't you, Helen? It would make us both very happy."

"Oh, mother, you do look ahead, don't you?"

"And why shouldn't I? I have your welfare at heart."

And the impressing of Bedford Park also, thought Helen. She could see her running about from neighbor to neighbor with triumph ill-concealed. Her daughter to marry Gerald Harvey! Gerald Harvey, the society man, my dear!

Because the man had money and a name in the "smart set" he was perfect and could do no wrong.

Sleeping in her old bed, habit awoke Helen at eight o'clock the next morning. She was impatient to see Marion. Her mother was a little hurt that she should leave the house so early. Apparently she had hoped to be able to take her daughter round and about Bedford Park, displaying her as one freshly home from the fashionable Riviera.

Helen explained that Marion de Guise was ill, that she must see her, and took a No. 88 bus for Oxford Street and Russell Square.

She found Marion. Six months had changed her incredibly, and it was difficult to detect the old Marion one had known. Helen went quietly to the bedside,

and stroked the white forehead with her finger-tips until the girl stirred and opened her eyes. Brooding trouble lay in her eyes, but at the sight of Helen a light came into them and a smile of happy recognition.

Helen found a tremendous relief in being able to talk to some one about Fabian, some one who had suffered at a man's hands, and yet who still believed, in all her disillusion, that there was sublime happiness to be found in this love business. Helen, so far, had had to bear alone the burden of her own hopes and desires, and, until she poured forth her confession, had not realized what a weight she had been carrying.

She told Marion the whole story.

"This Estelle la Rose," commented Marion, "sounds as though she is determined and not particularly troubled by pride or restraint. I can imagine that she uses her sex the whole time."

"She does, because she hasn't, really, very much else. Of course, we all use it, whether we know we do or not, but it always seems more decent, somehow, when it's unconscious, don't you think?"

"I suppose so. Although there's usually the moment when we fire off the guns deliberately. Personally, I think the Estelle type often defeats its end by not choosing the proper moments; by being too jolly alluring all the time. If the man isn't attracted right off he's apt to be irritated, even annoyed by it. He

usually wants to be the one to awaken response—most men are like that, I think. And your Fabian seems to be quite a normal kind of person. He has brains, and probably sensibilities of a more subtle kind than the average. I mean, if it dawned on him just how his actress was playing the siren he might go clean off her from the purely artistic point of view. After all, you are not quite sure how he regards her. Seriously or lightly, with real interest or artificial."

"He's not a bit artificial——"

"Of course he isn't, my dear—but he's a writer, isn't he? A creator—an artist? They're apt to dip their fingers into human emotions with the unconscious motive to experiment, to discover. But just the same they probably make the best lovers, the best husbands in the world, if they find the right woman."

"I hope I'm the right woman for Fabian Knight."

Marion smiled at her.

"A woman who can pick up life as you have, who can go out after what she thinks is good and true and beautiful, is the right woman for any Fabian Knight. I only hope that he has the sense to see you with his eyes wide open; see you, and recognize you."

"As I recognized him?"

"Yes."

"So you see why I'm in a hurry to get back, don't you, Marion? I'm so frightened that he may do something that will make it impossible for him to see any-

thing or anybody with his eyes wide open. Some one may come between his eyes and me."

"Of course I understand! My dear, you've done me more good than any doctor, any saint. Three days ago I was wanting to die. Now I am wanting, frightfully, to live—to get back to things and people—to start again. You've given me back my courage. I owe you everything."

This talk with Marion helped considerably to calm the panic which had been upon her lest her absence from Rapaccio might prove disastrous. Later that day, when she left her friend, she wired to Harvey, telling him that her father was better and that she was returning to Rapaccio. She wondered what effect her going away had had on him. By the time she was in Rapaccio again he would expect her to have reached a conclusion favorable to his desire for a *liaison* with her. He would point out, if she demurred, that she had had plenty of time to think about it. Also, in her showing such a readiness to return he might, with logic, infer that the idea was not unpalatable to her. The chase would begin again in earnest at a time when she would more than ever need her attention free to devote it to the deepening of her friendship with Fabian.

To whom she decided, suddenly, to write. She had excuse in the subject of Marion, and even if it were impersonal a letter from her would serve to remind

him of her. She wrote, therefore, of Marion, and ended :

My rush home was due to a false alarm. I expected to find my father dying, and he opened the front door for me! This England is cold and foggy, and I miss your sunshine.

Which last was more than literally true. She posted the letter, wondering if, by the time he read it, Estelle would be sharing his confidences.

The dull hours, perhaps not entirely wasted since they were spent mostly to her mother's satisfaction at home, dragged by slowly. The last night, spent half awake in her eagerness for the morning, and then the taxi to Victoria, the bustling platform, and the train, where the slow procession of the hours at last showed signs of marching a little faster.

CHAPTER XIII

RAPACCIO AGAIN

VENTIMIGLIA again, after an unexpected delay of an hour half a mile from the station, half a mile from Italy, with the blue sea lying within a few feet of the carriage-wheels. The sun was moving down the western sky, and the journey was almost completed. It had seemed longer than the first time she had gone out, perhaps because the romantic excitement of the early days had given place to an all-pervading anxiety. Another four hours, she told herself, as the train ran under the curved glass roof of the station and stopped with one-half of its length in Italy and the other left in France. Her suit-case was ready on the floor. The Italian train was waiting at the parallel platform. After passing through the Douane she would begin the last short stage of the journey. Then Rapaccio, and Fabian; and Harvey and Estelle.

She was no sooner out of the train and following the porter in the direction of the Customs than she saw Martin Fayre striding toward her, his long legs hurrying, his hat waving at her, and a large grin of wlecome spread across his face. She felt a glow of pleasure at the surprising sight of him. How nice of him to come

and meet her! Or was it that she should be able to learn from him what had been happening? Perhaps that was nearer the truth, but at the same time she could think of no one save Fabian whom she would rather have seen just then.

The next moment he had seized her hand.

"Thank God you've come back! I had a perfect hell of a day wondering what had caused you to fly off in such a dreadful hurry. Harvey, the brute, could have put my mind at rest if he'd liked, but he didn't like. He knew I wanted to know, badly. It was only later, when I heard him telling Knight that you'd gone back because your father was ill, that I found life at all palatable again. I haunted the Passionata for news of you, and this morning, Mrs. Anstruther told me that your father was better, and that you were expected to-day. Gosh! But I am glad to see you!"

She could not help responding to his enthusiasm. She patted his arm reassuringly.

"You make me terribly responsible for you, don't you?"

His face fell.

"I'm a selfish owl. And you must have had a rotten time. Come and eat something in the *caffè*. Our train doesn't go for another forty minutes. It won't take long to get your bag through the Douane. I know the *capo*."

Martin took charge of her completely in the most

natural manner in the world. She was aching to ask him whether Harvey, unprompted, had told Fabian why she had disappeared from Rapaccio, or if it had been in answer to an inquiry of Fabian's. But somehow the moment for such a question had passed. It would look odd if she went back to the subject.

She ate an omelet, and answered Martin's questions about her home-going, about her father's illness.

"He opened the door for you? You poor child! And you had been worrying your head off all the way across Europe!"

"It was rather an anti-climax—but I was awfully relieved."

"I wish I'd been around when the wire came for you. I should have been able to help you. I could have escorted you to London. Why didn't you let me know? Although, why should you, after all?" he added gloomily.

She steered the conversation away from this threat of personalities.

"How is everybody? I feel I've been away an age. Has anything exciting happened?"

"Let's see. You've been gone a week, more or less, haven't you? There's been the tennis tournament. Not particularly bright. A couple of Italian champions came up and gave us some thrilling sets. Oh, yes, and old Pilk lost his temper with an umpire—Graves, it was—and banged a ball a hundred yards out

of the campus. Somebody started clapping, and set the rest off. The old chap was as mad as a hatter for two days after it, and went ramping round raising the devil, as though he was still in the Army and we a crowd of disrespectful subalterns. He didn't get much satisfaction. I fancy his wife shut him up finally. I can't remember much else. The usual scandal-stuff goes the rounds, of course. Estelle la Rose forms the chief subject of it at the moment."

"Oh?"

"It's chiefly her clothes. The standard of dress is strictly provincial, you see, and tinged with early Edwardian. Paris—and knees—rather upsets them. In ten years' time they may realize what the fashion is—or was, by then. Personally, I think they've got their knife into her on account of Knight. He doesn't appear to share their aversion to her. Why should he? She helped to make his play for him, and I dare say she's an entertaining person to have around. A bit flashy, perhaps, but then I'm easily suspicious of that type—when it's also hard-headed."

"How? In what way?"

"I mean, she's a little too obvious. She seems to be inviting you to take her in your arms all the time, and yet I feel she's got a business instinct, and that there's a catch in it somewhere. That she's after something more than kisses and so on. I may be wrong, of course. I don't know much about 'em."

"She appeals to Mr. Knight, then?"

"Physically, I should say, yes. In other directions I can't see how she can."

Physically! It suggested, unpleasantly, a growing intimacy between them. Even Martin thought so, who didn't worry his head particularly about such matters.

"They go about a lot together?"

"Fair amount. She doesn't relax much, from what I can see of it. Why so interested?"

She withdrew quickly, realizing she had been over-eager.

"I like Mr. Knight, from what little I know of him, and I didn't like the la Rose woman."

That sounded natural enough, surely? But Martin looked at her searchingly. He was silent for a space and she wondered what passed in his mind; queer how sometimes he could be enormously important to her just for a moment or two—and then slip away and become nebulous again. She realized that she had scarcely given him a thought all the time she had been at home, and yet, looking at him now sitting opposite her, she remembered that he loved her with unusual whole-heartedness; and was, indeed, the only man who really loved her. Harvey's feeling for her could not be honored by that name, and John's, if it still existed, was tempered, and always had been tempered, by selfishness. She was sorrier for Martin than she had been for the unfortunate John, for Martin demanded

nothing of her, and accepted her verdict with no bitterness or reproach. Even had she been able to fall in love with him, it would have made no difference to those aspects of him; giving herself to him would have entailed no risk of his taking her for granted, as did so many men the women they had won. She thought of the Cinderella dreams of the days in the carpet manufacturer's, when she had tided herself through weariness and boredom by letting her mind play with pictures of an impossible fairyland world, in which she lived fully and was loved marvellously by charming men. Here, in Martin, was one who might have admirably fulfilled part of those imaginings, and yet, in reality, that he should love her at all failed to make her any happier. Actually it distressed and worried her. There had been the thrill at the beginning, when she had discovered that he did, but it had been quickly lost as the significance of what it meant to him dawned on her. She knew that it would hurt him beyond measure when she openly placed Fabian in the place he desired himself to occupy. When—and if! . . .

He found seats for them in the Rapaccio train, and, recovering from his low spirits, talked about everything under the sun in his light, entertaining fashion. He refused to admit any vein of seriousness, and she realized that he made of all life, of all things and people, a laughing-stock. Not in a cynical, unkind way, but out of sheer natural light-heartedness. It

struck her that such an attitude constantly paraded would be a little trying if one had to live with it, although, of course, it was infinitely preferable to the intense seriousness of a John Foster. Martin was rich, always had been rich apparently, and, unlike most rich people, had deliberately avoided the responsibilities of wealth, which usually weighed them down as heavily as did poverty the so-called less fortunate ones. He had used his money as a shield, not as a sword, which was in most cases double-edged. In very truth he could afford to be care-free.

During the next few hours that they were alone together in the compartment he unobtrusively gave her to understand that he would succeed with her sooner or later, and she knew that as long as she remained evidently free and unattached to any particular man she would never be able to convince him that he must ultimately fail. Such was his ingenuous optimism.

She saw that when later he realized that she was beyond his reach neither his optimism, nor his wealth, nor anything he could devise would soften the blow. It would take him hard, because he had not taken blows before. It would be the first, and that was the pity of it. She hated the thought that she must be the one to deal it.

And so, knowing that neither coldness nor unkindness could at this stage have any effect in protecting him from the suffering into which he was rushing so

blindly—and so charmingly—she made a point of being very kind to him, hoping vaguely that a few pleasant memories of her, surviving the catastrophe, would help him.

Life, she decided, was altogether a grim affair, even in fairyland.

Martin did not leave the train at Andora, as she had been thinking might be best since Harvey would probably be meeting her at Rapaccio. He took no notice of the place beyond pointing to a hill on which clustered a picturesque huddle of ancient grey buildings.

"The feudal castle. Ninety-four rooms, eight dungeons, a torture-chamber, and, in spite of the medieval susceptibilities of the ghosts, six modern bathrooms. I had to put them in. Impossible otherwise——"

The train swept on, and the castle disappeared in the red after-glow of sunset. She wondered at that in her which many girls would have called madness. To turn one's back on a castle and its wealthy overlord! She realized that by saying two or three words she could live in that romantic home, secure in Martin's affection and beyond the reach of material worry to the end of her days.

Perhaps some similar thought came to him, for he became unexpectedly wistful, and she saw his eyes on

her face. Instinctively she put a hand on his, and said:

"I'm so sorry, Martin dear——"

He moved his shoulders slightly, as if to throw off this despondency which kept assailing him, and, without speaking, drew her hand within his arm, where she allowed it to stay during the fifteen minutes or so which the train took to reach the outlying parts of Rapaccio.

Somewhat to her relief he suggested of his own accord that perhaps it would be more politic if Harvey found her alone. "He is pretty sure to meet you."

"Perhaps it would be better. He—he is inclined to make scenes——"

For a moment she thought that he was going to break forth into irritable questions and reproaches about her remaining within Harvey's sphere of activity. Some kind of emotion seemed to surge in him. He coughed slightly, and rose.

"I'll shift into another carriage. Will you be at the Tennis Club to-morrow morning?"

"Maybe. But I can't make any promise. Mr. Harvey may want to work."

Martin, with a set mouth, nodded, and disappeared down the corridor.

The train drew into the station. Rapaccio! She looked quickly through the window opposite the platform toward the hillside, and Fabian's villa. It was

in darkness, blank darkness, and, although she assured herself she was being silly, she could not help taking it as a portent.

Then came the bustle, passengers moving along the corridor to the doors, and the shouting porters. She reached the platform, and saw Harvey standing a little distance off, looking up and down for her, frowning anxiously, and it occurred to her as ironical that she should have to go up to him and render herself to his escort.

Surrounded by people, his greeting was circumspect, but his eyes sought her face hungrily, moved over her body.

In the brougham, over which the hood was drawn, enclosing them together in semi-darkness, his circumspection vanished abruptly. His arm was round her before they were out of the station-yard, straining her to him.

"Thank God you've come back!" he said.

Which were exactly the words Martin had used. But what a difference in their voices! There was greed and almost savage triumph in Harvey's. He assumed, as she expected, that she would not have returned if not to face his love-making with complacency.

"The second telegram arrived for you the morning after you left, and I took the liberty of opening it, fearing your father was dead. When I realized that

you needn't have gone at all I tell you I was wild. I thought if little Helen is frightened of me she won't come back. I had a rotten few days of it, I assure you. I wanted you like hell! And knew I hadn't realized before what a hold your small fingers had got on my heart——"

The carriage slackened its pace as the horse came to the hill-road. The heavy plod of hoofs and the grinding of the wheels were sounds which seemed to go through her. It was little use trying to escape Harvey's embrace in such a confined space. Short of jumping out and walking she had no alternative but to submit, passively, hoping that he would realize that she was tired after her journey and that plenty of time and more congenial surroundings for making love to her adorned the immediate future.

Encouraged by her submission, he twisted her round so that she lay in both his arms.

"Gerald! No, please don't! People can see in quite easily, and anyway I'm tired out, and grubby, and not a bit in a pleasant mood. I hate trains."

"You've come back. That's all I care about. You're going to be kind to me, little one?"

"We'll see, Gerald. I've had a dreadful time, one way and another, and you must let me get settled down again. I haven't had a moment to think of anything——"

"You've had days!"

"In trains! I tell you I hate trains. I can't do anything in them but read——"

"Well, kiss me, anyhow."

What was the use? She let him, and it did not stir her at all; merely annoyed and disgusted her. What a man! He hadn't the sense or the tact of a goat. She couldn't help it if she made him angry by being cold and unreasonable.

Actually he accepted what he termed her mood more readily than she expected. He was still secure in the belief that she would not be here with him at all if she had not decided to yield to him. If it pleased her to dally, let her dally. His time was coming.

She was thankful indeed when she realized that he was prepared to be lenient; it meant that if she could ask for time now she could still go on asking for it later, when the effects of train-travel had worn off, and other excuses had worn thin. It looked as though her theory about him was right: that it was the chase which really intrigued him. The whole situation resolved itself into the need for her to keep that chase going as long as possible and to elude him at the end. She wondered whether during her absence he had been consoling himself with the unfortunate Ivy Rogerton.

The gates of the Villa Silencia garden were closed when the carriage passed, and she could see no light through the trees. Harvey did not attempt to kiss her again, but he insisted upon holding her in his arms

almost to the door of the Passionata, assuring her, when she tried to regain the carriage-seat, that she was more comfortable where she was. She did not argue, knowing that she could not expect to win every point.

Mrs. Anstruther greeted her warmly, and Helen realized that she had come to like her in spite of her social snobbery. At heart, and certainly in intelligence, the good lady was very simple and unpretentious. It was a relief to have her as an unconscious shield from Harvey's importunities. In the light of the dining-room he had to restrain his eyes, his tongue, and his desire to make quite sure that his secretary was ready to become his mistress.

At dinner his sister asked him:

"When are you going to make a proper start at that book, Gerald? I'm sure Helen is anxious to get to work——"

"Of course I am," said Helen.

He nodded.

"I've got to map out the first subject; yet I should think that by next week I ought to be able to get down to it. There's no frantic hurry."

"Of course not," agreed Mrs. Anstruther a little hastily, realizing that for some reason her brother was not pleased at her hint of interference.

"You look tired, Helen."

"I am rather. I slept badly on the train last night.

I think if you'll excuse me I'll get off to bed after dinner."

"Certainly, my dear. In any case I have asked the Pilks down to play bridge, and you don't play. We shall be a four."

Harvey frowned. He hadn't suggested having the Pilks in, and the fact that while Helen was away the evenings had been devoted to bridge was no reason why his sister should presume he wanted to play it every blessed night.

Helen faced the rest of dinner with thankfulness, in the knowledge that for to-night at all events escape and respite were hers. Somehow it was always the evening she dreaded most where Harvey was concerned. During the daytime there were people about, and sunshine, and active things to do, all helping to keep him at a distance; but at night it was different; he came into his own them. And now, with the crisis looming nearer, hours of darkness would be more dangerous.

Mrs. Anstruther suddenly began talking about Estelle la Rose, bringing out the name abruptly, startling Helen.

"Estelle la Rose," she announced, "came into the Club this afternoon in a frock which I must say wasn't in the best taste. I'm not frumpish or old-fashioned, I hope, and I wouldn't go to the extremes Lady Mastersen goes to when she talks about the actress. After all, she *is* an actress, and what else can you expect?"

"But some actresses, most in these days, are very

dull and respectable," said Harvey. "Of course, Estelle's family was frankly of the 'boards,' and she started in the chorus."

"I admire her for climbing out of it," remarked Helen, thinking at the same time that that did not really excuse her being what Marian had called "flashy," which was what these Rapaccio people saw in her, and distrusted and disapproved of. Naturally, like anything else, it came out in a woman's clothes.

Mrs. Anstruther, in due support of her claim that she was not old-fashioned, displayed no embarrassment.

"It showed every line of her figure—her bust, and the fact that she doesn't corset, or wear any underclothes worth mentioning. It was shorter, too, than it had any need to be. Pale green satin, with a high gold collar, and long, tight sleeves with gold cuffs. Lady Mastersen stared at her through her lorgnette and said quite loudly that she thought it was disgusting. I think Estelle la Rose heard."

"Estelle would have been disappointed if she hadn't heard," Harvey said. "If I know Estelle she put on that dress simply because she happened to be going into the Club where all the Lady Mastersens were, just to annoy them. Some of their chat has been repeated to her, I expect. There's usually some one who is willing to make sure the gossipee hears what the gossipers say. Jove, I remember how she——"

He stopped short, and ate a salted almond, while

Mrs. Anstruther looked at him doubtfully. Helen went quietly on with an apple, wondering just how well Harvey knew, or had known, Estelle. It was not the first time he had hinted at a better knowledge of her than he showed openly in Rapaccio. Pepeto brought in the coffee, and the conversation passed to other subjects.

Then General Pilk boomed into the vila, his bright-faced wife in black sequins trailing after him, and Helen slipped away without going into the drawing-room. She was in no frame of mind to listen to the General's heavy gallantry.

Standing on the veranda outside her room, she remembered vividly the night similar to this, which seemed so long ago, when the Pilks came in to bridge, and Martin was there; when she trespassed in Fabian's garden, and saw him for the second time in her life. The moon was waning, but there was enough light left in it to throw every bush and tree into relief. Details of Rapaccio town were distinguishable. Although it was October, the nights were still warm on this sheltered hillside above the sea. She left the windows open when she turned back into the room, and began brushing her hair by the shaded light at her dressing-table. She regarded her face detachedly. Were her eyes brighter than they used to be, and her skin, rescued from the soot-laden air of London, already clearer than she had ever known it? She bent forward, startled. Yes. She had changed amazingly. She knew that being in love

was supposed to have quite an effect on one's looks, but she would never have credited it with such power, and in so short a time. "Why," she said half-aloud, "I'm —I'm almost beautiful!"

She knew that her mouth was wistful, even unhappy; that there was trouble under the brightness of her eyes; but she could not deny that a kind of diffused and indefinite radiancy dwelt in her face. It was a queer feeling, to look at one's face and scarcely recognize it. But what she saw was pleasing and heartening. She was better equipped, better armed, than she had been, and the realization gave her a new strength. There was no reason why Fabian should not find her good to look upon, a possibility she had never counted upon before. It meant that she had something else with which to attract besides the more subtle, less perceptible appeal of heart and mind—of personality. Her significance as a woman might have occurred to Fabian already.

Fabian! He filled her thoughts continually.

She went again on to the veranda, and looked down the terraces toward the hidden solitudes of his garden beyond the boundary wall. Where was he to-night? At Pontenero's with Estelle, perhaps, or entertaining her at the villa. Her indefinite knowledge of what was really happening was becoming hourly more difficult to bear. She was tired. She knew that she needed sleep, and quite a lot of it, to refresh and bring her to

a less anxious, less pessimistic mood. Nothing ever seemed hopeful at such a time as this.

But being able to reason thus had no force when it came to making up her mind to get undressed and jump into bed. Suddenly she could not bear the thought of sleep. She wanted, almost hysterically, to do something, anything, to put off the moment when she must lie in the darkness with her thoughts.

A little desperately she left the veranda, and went softly down the path and the steps which led from one terrace to another, until she came to the garden of the Silencia. At the wall she hesitated, telling herself that there could be no point in roaming about Fabian's property. She might meet one of the servants or somebody, and it would be awkward. And even if she escaped observation, what good could it do? It wouldn't make him love Estelle any less, and that was all that mattered in the world.

She scaled the wall where she had climbed over the night Fabian had come to Rapaccio, the same spot where he lifted her over it that great day of Marion's letter, when he had come to her lair, and afterward had walked and talked with her so wonderfully.

With no deliberate objective, she walked quietly toward the rose pergola, which was the only place familiar to her in the garden. She went slowly, her head bent, her eyes absorbed, a little more at peace with herself than she had been in Harvey's villa. Here,

under the bunching masses of rambler-roses, she felt nearer Fabian.

And was, actually, much nearer him than she realized —until she reached a point ten yards or so from a rustic seat in the middle of the pergola, where four paths met. A glimmer of silver in the moonlight penetrated the leaves, and she came to a halt. Then the movement again. She stepped forward a pace so that she could see the seat, and more of the thing which glimmered in the moonlight.

A silver evening frock. . . .

Estelle lay in Fabian's arms, hers entwined about his neck as she kissed him. Her bare shoulders shone whitely against his black sleeve, and her marvellous hair glittered as though flecked and woven with gold.

Lovers in the moonlight. . . .

Helen stumbled away, blinded by hot tears, and somehow reached her room, lost to all sense but the aching misery of her heart. She undressed in the darkness for fear she might see herself in the mirror which had assured her she was beautiful.

CHAPTER XIV

DISILLUSION

It was just the way of things that Fabian should be one of the first people she set eyes on the following morning.

She had fallen asleep suddenly, utterly exhausted, at midnight, but at seven she awoke to a consciousness wholly claimed by what she had seen in the garden of the Villa Silencia. It was impossible to lie in bed and suffer the eternal circling of her thoughts. She rang and asked for coffee and rolls, and dressed while the tray was being prepared. Consequently she was abroad before the household was about, and set out upon a walk in the clear morning air to drive the stuffiness out of her head and perhaps some of the sharp pain of failure from her heart. Estelle had reached the point where she kissed Fabian, and was kissed by him. Helen could see nothing but the inference to be drawn therefrom. He wasn't a woman-hunter like Harvey; he wouldn't allow matters to reach a point of intimacy unless he believed his emotions to be genuinely and significantly aroused.

She found herself now without a single notion of what to do next. The thing had smashed her optimism

at a moment when it needed support in strengthening hope if it were to live on. She had no reserves. It was futile, even, to hope that if Estelle were given enough rope she would inevitably hang herself. She wouldn't. She was too clever, too experienced.

Helen left the house by the French windows of her room, and in the garden reached the gates and the hill-road. She chose to walk up rather than down toward the town where there would be people. She wanted to be alone.

She strode out, the breeze, chilled by distant snows, full in her face, stinging her cheeks. The late-coming winter was drawing nearer in these days, and she was glad she had put on a tweed costume. The day would be warmer when the sun mounted higher.

A mule-team drawing a heavy log-cart passed her and jingled down toward the town. The men with it were singing, light-hearted and care-free at the beginning of a day which would find them toil-wearied at its end. There was a peasant girl trotting barefooted in the white dust by the side of the cart, and she also was singing. Her skirt was in rags, her brown legs scratched and dirty with dried blood—she had been with the woodcutters in the hills. Her young shoulders were already bowed with the drudgery of gruelling labor. She had been born in a hovel, would live, brutally, like a beast of the field; she would bear more children than she wanted, would slave for them, and at the end would

die in squalor because her body refused further to support the hardships imposed upon it.

Yet she sang, her young brown eyes dancing in the early sunshine.

Helen could almost envy her.

Into the fading song came the sound of footsteps behind her, and she glanced over her shoulder. Her heart jumped. It was Fabian.

"I thought it was you! Good morning!"

She did not know whether she wanted to see him or not. Twelve hours ago such a meeting would have made her utterly happy . . . but now, with the ghost of Estelle la Rose standing by his side, she was completely unprepared. She could think of nothing to say —and even the formalities of greeting refused to come to her.

"I saw you leave the gates," he went on. "I'm so glad you've come back."

Fabian said that also; the third——

"You went away so suddenly. I was expecting to see you the day after our walk, you know—and you weren't anywhere about. Harvey told me, at last, where you were. I got your letter." He had fallen into step at her side.

"I saw Marion—she is going to be quite all right, I think."

"Good. And your father?"

"Has recovered. It was a false alarm." She was

wondering, suddenly, what on earth could she be looking like. She hadn't dressed with any particular care; certainly not with a view to meeting anyone. He answered her thoughts.

"You don't look as if you had travelled nearly two thousand miles in a week and finished them last night. They talk about women being the weaker vessels. I've always doubted it. Look at you, glowing with health! I should be a wreck. . . ."

She silently thanked the cold breeze for its ministrations.

"It's a bit early to look one's best."

"Hum . . ." he remarked, meaning anything or nothing as far as she could see, and, after exchanging a few commonplaces with her, he dropped suddenly into thought and walked without speaking for several minutes, a pause which gave her time to recover to a certain extent from the surprise of his appearance. She began wondering why he had come after her, and where he had been when he caught sight of her. In the Silencia? In which case he must have hurried considerably to catch up with her so soon. He had neither asked whether she minded him walking with her, nor, seemingly, had it occurred to him that he was behaving oddly.

She felt a lot better. Being with him made Estelle's kiss less important. Or was hope struggling into existence again? His forehead, visible because he wore no

hat, was ruffled by a faint but persistent frown. What was he thinking about?

Presently he came back to the fact that she was with him, and apologized for his silence.

"Wool-gathering. But I noticed that first day how natural it seemed to be with you. You're companionable, I suppose. I mean, I don't feel I'm being rude by being quiet—if I'm in the mood to be quiet."

"Of course it isn't rude. I should feel, though, that you were being rude if you were to chatter to me as though I had to be amused all the time and hadn't thoughts of my own to keep me entertained."

"There are women like that—women who expect to be amused incessantly. And exacting creatures they are."

She wanted to believe that he was thinking of Estelle la Rose, for he spoke with more feeling than seemed necessary for a general observation.

"So your thoughts," he said, "are entertaining?"

"Not exactly, in the strict sense of the word. I was thinking about that girl who passed just now with the mules. I was imagining what a harsh thing life must be for her."

"These hill-people are a sturdy race. They are born to it, and it's queer how quickly they degenerate if they come down to the coast villages and live more softly. They make life romantic in their way, though."

"You know them better than I do. I was looking

at them from my own standard—which is always the wrong way, isn't it? I suppose when you say they make life romantic, the sex relationships occupy them——"

"To the exclusion of everything except the struggle with poverty, which is a hard one some years. When they aren't working they are eating and drinking and making love. They're a passionate crowd, and they have few if any notions of repression, but who blames them? They put warmth and color into an existence which would kill us with its sheer drudgery."

She could see his secret thoughts, and they did not help. He was talking almost eagerly now, as though he wanted to develop an idea which had come to him recently.

"We cultured products sit around and talk about life, but we don't live it. Words, speculations, prejudices, other people's experiences—on these we build up what we think life is. Lots of us do; most of us do. How many of us seize hold of it? We look opportunity in the face, and then discuss it instead of taking advantage of it. It's appalling, the slothful, insincere way we go from one day to another, shutting our eyes to everything that's real and significant. Experience comes our way—we run from it, drawing stupid conclusions based on an arbitrary arrangement of ideas called 'wisdom.' Look at this love business. Who knows anything about it? We read about it, write

about it, think about it—and half the time we're frightened to death of it!"

Helen thought, "I'm not, anyway," and saw so clearly under his words an effort to destroy an instinctive reluctance where Estelle la Rose was concerned.

"The trouble about taking advantage of opportunity in things like that," she said, "is that you never quite know where they'll lead."

"That's just where I think we're so weak. This continual counting of problematical profit and loss is the curse of us all. We're too timid."

Had he, then, thrown discretion out of his rose-garden last night? Or was he trying to make up his mind to do so?

She hoped, vainly, that he would go on with his theme, but he changed the subject somewhat abruptly, and there followed another long session of interesting but unimportant conversation about everything except those matters which occupied her real attention. She was asking herself all the while if he were honestly in love with Estelle la Rose, and trying to make up her mind about it from his mood, his attitude toward things, from what he did not say. She felt that the answer to the question was hidden close under the surface, but she could neither see nor sense it.

They walked for an hour and a half before returning to the villas, and when he said good-bye at the gates of the Passionata, and she saw his broad back moving

away from her, she had a longing to run after him and —and what?

There was nothing to be done. Nothing! One moment the futility of further effort was all too clear to her, the next she was telling herself she was a fool to weaken in her resolve when every minute she spent in his company emphasized her nearness to him in all that mattered in life. He had called her "companionable," but without discovering how significant that fact could be. She knew him well enough now to see that he would not often find companionship in one of the opposite sex, and to suspect that the companionship he hoped to gain in Estelle la Rose was of the variety men found most easily in women—and the soonest learnt by them to be insufficient. She knew also that he, the expert in other people's emotions, had failed to analyze his own. He would invest Estelle's attraction for him with his own romantic attitude, seeing in it far more than it actually contained, until at some late hour the truth would come to him, with its inevitable pain.

But Helen Palmer was the last person in the world who might explain it to him. She must stand silently by and watch his tragedy, which was also hers, grow to its dark blossoming.

Harvey was smoking his after-breakfast cigarette in the garden when she entered it, and he was surprised to see her.

"I thought you were making a lazy morning of it. Where on earth have you been?" He looked at her dusty shoes.

"Letting the wind blow the smuts out of my lungs. I awoke early."

"I would have come with you if I'd known. How are you feeling now? You look amazingly beautiful. These alarms and excursions suit you. Done any thinking, by the way?"

"A lot. It doesn't get me anywhere."

"Where I am concerned?"

Her silence admitted that this was true, and he sighed with mock disappointment.

"Oh, well—we must talk it over properly."

He was standing close to her as she looked down the hill at the town. She would not meet his eyes, unpleasantly aware of them measuring her. She knew that his "talking it over" meant making as ardent love to her as possible the moment an opportunity arose. She was glad there was a whole day before her to be filled with small activities which would keep him safely at arm's length. She had no hope of escaping his company, however.

"What shall we do this morning?" he asked.

"Are you going to begin work?"

"Oh, that damned book! What hypocrites women are!"

She seized that as an admirable excuse to be offended.

"Am I a hypocrite because you invented this secretaryship as a means of getting me here to make love to me?"

"Here!" he exclaimed. "That's a bit thick. I assure you, Helen, I——"

"If it wasn't a preconceived, deliberate plan what was it?"

"I simply wanted to help you, to get you into the sunshine, to show you Italy—to be a good friend to you! You needn't have accepted if you hadn't wanted to!" He was angry now, and she saw that she had gone far enough.

"I'm sorry. I'm worried about it all. . . ."

He was partially mollified.

"How? In what way?"

"I can't explain."

"Try."

She hesitated.

"Well, there's that Rogerton girl, for one thing. I mean, if you really cared for me I don't think you could possibly make love to anyone else."

"Who said——?" he began, and stopped as he met her eyes, in which lay a deeper conviction than he could contradict. That the jealous Ivy had in some way openly shown her triumph was now only too plain. He threw away his cigarette and licked his lips with the tip of a pointed tongue.

"But, my dear girl, let me explain——

"How can you possibly explain? Besides, there are other things. No, please don't let's talk about it now."

From that he understood that another time she might be willing to, and would, perhaps, allow her doubts to be set at rest. He was glad of the respite, even at the expense of anxiety about what "other things" meant, since he could not at the moment think of any adequate reason why he had paid any attention to Ivy's plea that he should be kind to her. That was the worst of women. They could never see that because you adored them once upon a time you must necessarily adore them for ever. It had been idiotic of him to encourage her, even if she were being hauled off to Sicily by her parents two days later.

Helen herself changed the subject by suggesting they should play tennis. He agreed enthusiastically, for which she was thankful. Martin would be at the Tennis Club, ready to besiege her and separate her from Harvey if he could.

At noon heavy clouds came up from the west and obscured the sky. A thin drizzle of rain set in, which spoiled the tennis and drove the players into the club-house, where Martin insisted upon giving a picnic lunch-party. He needed little perception to see that Helen was worrying her head off about something, and there came to him afresh the dire need to help her. She wouldn't let him; she shut him out as she shut out the

rest of the world; and although he admired her restraint it did nothing to soothe him. His failure was ever in his mind, gnawing and hurting.

He saw to it that she sat next to him at the table, and strove to make her tell him what was troubling her.

"Nothing, Martin, nothing——"

"You promised, once, that if ever you wanted anything you'd let me know."

"I will. I promise again."

And with that he had to comfort himself.

An improvised dance was arranged after lunch, and, clearing the lounge of its furniture, they commandeered the secretary's radio. The rain fell steadily, and toward tea-time the wind became gusty, driving the rain against the windows. A dreary, colorless afternoon, emphasized by the men's flannels and the white frocks of the girls.

At length carriages were sent for, and the crowd dispersed. Martin invited himself to tea at the Passionata, and drove up the hill with Helen and Harvey. Although she knew he was a protection from Harvey, she saw that he was also an irritant to him. The mere fact that Martin was near her made keener Harvey's desire.

The hours went slowly by. Martin went, his eyes pleading and miserable. Harvey retired to write letters, and left her with Mrs. Anstruther. She tried to read a book, and gave it up. She spent a long time at the

window, staring at the mist of rain which hung over the darkening world and made the sea invisible, so that the villa seemed perched in a cloud midway between earth and sky. She caught occasional glimpses of the white roofs of Fabian's villa. Mrs. Anstruther, knitting, chatted, careless of reply. Until:

"Is it still raining, dear?"

"Yes."

"A dreadful day. The Riviera in the rain is worse than any place in the world."

"I see now that all the color comes from the sun. How grey it is without it!"

"Yes. I'm sure I don't want to go to the Club tonight if it's going to be like this. But the carriage is ordered."

"The Club? You're going to the Club?" Helen stopped looking at the rain.

"After dinner—a bridge-party."

"Gerald didn't tell me."

"Oh, it's only an old hen party. He's not going."

"I see." She kept the nervousness out of her voice, and added, "I expect we'll go to Pontenero's."

"I expect so," agreed Mrs. Anstruther, who was sitting on the edge of a volcano, with her back to it, blissfully unaware of its existence. She went on knitting placidly.

And at dinner, when Helen suggested, "Let's go

and dance, Gerald," he decided that he did not feel up to it. The rain always made him tired—and, anyway, it was such a dirty night. Even with a carriage there and back one would get splattered.

We'll have a quiet evening by the fireside," he said. "Pepeto's got a roaring blaze going in the small sitting-room."

"I wish I had sent a message to the Club to say I wouldn't come," sighed Mrs. Anstruther, but not because she thought there was any harm in leaving Helen and her brother alone together.

"It isn't too late, is it, to send a message? The carriage——"

"Oh, but I must go. Lady Mastersen would be terribly offended——"

She went, grumbling, but excited.

"Now," said Harvey, "we'll talk, Helen."

"I—I'd rather not."

"Oh, come on!" He linked his arm in hers and led her into the small sitting-room, where he drew the chesterfield to the fire. "A cigarette?"

She took one, and lit it with a steady hand. Whatever happened, she must keep her head and show him she was not nervous. After all, she really wasn't afraid of him. She knew that with deep certainty.

She sat in the extreme corner of the couch and watched him. His hands were trembling, his mouth was slightly parted, and his voice was husky. He talked

and talked, and she understood little of what he said, which was incredibly muddled and chaotic—a jumble, but a jumble which reeked of concupiscence no less than did his dull, devouring eyes.

She knew now that if she did not fear him she feared terribly this indefinable thing he carried within him. It was through all nature, this thing, lying beneath the veneer of orderliness with which life was disguised. It was brutal, crushing, destructive, bestial; denying illusion, breaking down and trampling upon gentleness. It sought only to defile.

She found herself in his arms, his mouth upon her lips, and she beat at his neck and face with all her strength. He laughed and kissed her again and again. Her breath was stifled by the terror which caught her and overcame her mind's efforts to control it, so that she could not scream. Reason left her; she struggled frantically in silence against the increasing pressure of his arms, against the seeking of his hands. The blood drummed in her ears above the swish and flurry of wind and rain outside. In frantic extremity of fear she bit his cheek, and did not know why he cursed even as he laughed again.

CHAPTER XV

REFUGE

But between the curse and the laugh, for a fraction of a second, there was a pause in the fury of his attack; his arms loosened slightly, and his head moved back. It was an infinitesimal pause, scarcely perceptible, but the girl unconsciously seized upon it as a moment in which to exert her failing strength. She twisted in his grasp, her fists struck his face, and he slipped, clutched at her, tore the narrow shoulder of her frock, and lost her. She was on her feet and flying to the door while he dabbed angrily at his bleeding cheek. She wrenched the door open as he jumped to his feet, and, before he had started in pursuit, was half-way down the hall passage to the front door.

She could no longer think or feel as a rational being, so intense was the urge of her instinct to escape those hands and arms and lips, that loathsome body against which she had been held. Dimly she heard his sharp command to stop, and it served only to increase her need to get out of the house into the sheltering darkness. Terror was at her heels, safety in front of her. She opened the door, slammed it behind her, and the next instant was wet to the skin, her light shoes soaked in the muddy gravel of the drive. No use to run down

the garden, falling over terraces and things in the darkness. Keep to the open, where you could run and run. How cold the rain was! Her clothes clung to her body, and the wind cut like a knife, even through the heat of her fear. Now she had passed out of the shaft of light which had fallen upon her when he opened the door, but she thought she heard the thud of his pursuing feet. Through the gates and out into the road. . . . She stumbled, and grazed her palms as she saved herself from falling on her face . . . and on down the road, her lungs bursting and her eyes full of lashing rain.

She had got away from him. She had got away. A thought came into her mind, and another . . . she was sentient again, gathering her scattered wits. God! but she had been frightened! And here she was in a perfect downpour, drenched by the cascading sky. But she couldn't go back to the house.

She discovered that she was still running, and slackened her pace. She was close by the garden gates of Villa Silencia. She felt for them, groping, and found them. They were shut, and through the turmoil of her emotions she was glad, realizing that Fabian was at home, for had he gone out it would have been in a carriage, and the gates would have been left open against his return. She passed through them, closing them after her, and began running again, conscious at last that in her wild flight was not only an instinctive desire to escape Harvey, but also a blind hope for

sanctuary with the man she loved. Fabian . . . she wanted Fabian. She followed the drive, vaguely less dark than its surrounding garden, toward the house, until she saw two narrow lines of light thrown into the darkness from the shuttered windows of the library.

She was exhausted by the time she reached the shelter of the veranda, and for a moment she leant against the wall between the windows, her head pressing against the rough stone. Was Fabian on the other side of it? And would he be alone? Without Estelle? If she had come up in this rain the gates would have been open.

A sound in the deep hiss of rain falling on a thousand leaves brought back all her panic. She stumbled to the nearest window and beat the shutters with her clenched hands; a fit of sobbing came upon her, racking her body. Would the window never open? She dared not look over her shoulder for fear that Harvey was there, creeping along the veranda. She strained her ears for a repetition of the sound which had startled her. Oh, the rain! Why couldn't it stop for a moment long enough for her to listen?

There was a squeak of the bar inside being taken away, and the shutters moved slightly. She put her finger-tips in the crack between them and tried to pull them open. Quickly! Quickly!

"Who's there?"

It was Fabian's voice, thank God!

"Let me in!"

The shutters opened, and she all but fell through them into the warm light. Fabian caught her.

"Helen!"

"Don't—I'm wet——"

"Whatever's happened? Heavens! what a state you're in!"

"I—oh, I had to get away. Oh, bother . . . I . . ."

Sobs shook her again, and she could not control them. Her knees had no strength in them, and she would have fallen but for his support. He led her to an arm-chair at the fireside, and put her in it. She buried her head in her wet arms and tried to regain command of herself. She was safe now—safe. Harvey could not pursue her here. Fabian was with her. Fabian—— What could she say to him? In spite of her utter desolation, her loss of all physical and mental resource, she realized that coming to him like this put her at a disadvantage. Oh, if only she had not been so afraid! What a little fool she had been to allow Harvey to behave like that—to let him frighten her so badly! Where had her cleverness been when the crisis came—the crisis she had so long foreseen and armed herself against? What a useless, silly thing she was! What had happened to her vaunted self-confidence? Her joy in the adventure she had so blithely set out upon?

Fabian was touching her bare shoulder.

"For God's sake," he said, "don't cry like that!"

She couldn't help it—couldn't stop it—what a damp

mess she was making of his chair! Pull yourself together, Helen! Pull yourself together! You've got to tell him—got to explain about Harvey. She lifted her head, and to her anxiety found that he was no longer in the room. Instantly she was on her feet, her hand to her throat. The windows were shut, and the barred shutters stood as barriers to the night—and Harvey if he searched for her. But where had Fabian gone, and why?

The door opened, and he came in carrying a large camel-hair dressing-gown. He seemed relieved to find that she was no longer sobbing, but he looked at her, trying to determine what the trouble was.

"You'll have to get those wet clothes off whatever happens. You'll get pneumonia or something. Put this on."

He laid the dressing-gown on a chair, smiled reasuringly at her, and went out of the room again. She stared at the dressing-gown. Her tumultuous mind dwelt on his quiet acceptance of her plight and became calmer.

She undressed, realizing for the first time how absolutely soaked she was, and slipped on the dressing-gown. Its soft, fleecy texture was grateful to her cold skin, and almost at once she felt more herself. She stilled the last echo of her weeping, and looked ruefully at the sodden heap of garments on the hearthrug.

A knock on the door, and Fabian again.

"We'll get them dried," he said. "The servants are

in bed by now, but I expect there's a fire in the kitchen still. Drink this—it will warm you up."

He poured her out a brandy, and solemnly gathered up the wet clothes and went off with them. Lying back in the chair, sipping the breath-taking drink, she watched him go; and realized that she loved him with everything that there was in her. His quietness, the unexcited way he was gently taking command of this unusual situation, pleased her, and withal inexplicably, for there was nothing surprising in his placidity. It was, after all, just how she would have expected him to behave had she had time in her panic to wonder what he would do. He conveyed an immeasurable sense of security, and of that she had known little for a long time; indeed, when John Foster had stormed her and claimed her love he had taken away the deep safety of unknowing youth, and had given her in its place an occasional unformulated discomfort where men were concerned. But with Fabian that disappeared, and she was sure of herself and of him. She felt she could always be at peace with him whatever he thought or said or did.

The understanding with which he had sheltered and succored her showed her more of him then she could have seen in a thousand hours of conversation. He had asked no questions save in his first surprise, and had concerned himself only with her bodily needs. She knew, also, that he would continue to ask no questions, unless she displayed a wish to explain things to him.

Yes, she loved him, worshipped him, and felt suddenly humble. During the few moments he was out of the room she saw herself as a creature of conceited ambition, which she had disguised as romantic aspiration. It was all very well to have fallen in love with him the first time she saw him, but what right, what earthly right, had she to hope that she had the power to make him love her?

She was the shorthand-typist from the office of a carpet manufacturer, a girl like a hundred thousand others who struggled for bread-and-butter and pin-money in London, and he was Fabian Knight—the only Fabian Knight. She had employed her sex to make things go the way she wanted them to, had told fibs and led on Gerald Harvey—almost to her own destruction—in order to be near this man who was now hanging out her wet garments in his kitchen, in order that she might make him love her as she loved him. She had been prepared to sacrifice all she possessed, all she was, to bring that about, and to sacrifice others that they might be rungs in the ladder of her climb. She had been calculating, heartless, callous, and deliberate. She had taken risks, and played with a kind of fire which burnt more than she expected. In the eyes of a good many people she had been a rotten little adventuress.

Now that she regarded it in a quieter frame of mind this was the critical moment for which she had been waiting. It had come unexpectedly, and she had neither

planned it nor schemed for it. Harvey, unwittingly, in his passion, had brought it about.

She would know soon, within a few minutes, perhaps, whether she had won or lost. If she had won she had built happiness with her own hands. If she had lost—— That thought found her a coward.

She would learn what had lain under his first shocked exclamation at the sight of her distraught with fear and drenched to the bone by the rain. She would see quickly behind his kindly eyes whether he cared for her or could ever care for her. Her coming to him like this would shake him, and he would find himself thinking about her to the exclusion of everything and everybody else. And the manner of his thinking would determine his heart, and his eyes would show her that.

His step outside as he returned. The door opened, and he came in. She snuggled down in the warm dressing-gown, her hands thrust into the huge pockets. But she was tense under her ease, searching his face for a sign.

"Feeling better?"

"Much, thank you. This—is—is very kind of you," A poor, inadequate phrase, she felt.

He was looking at her.

"Another peg?"

"No thanks. I'm really all right now." She paused, and added, "I'm afraid I made a fool of myself just now—breaking down. It was all my own silly fault.

I deserved the wetting. But you didn't deserve such a dreadful visitation A drowned rat of a girl bursting into your library!"

"I'm glad you came here."

Her heart quickened, and again she sought his eyes. There was no telling what thoughts moved there. Why was he glad she had come here? Had he said that because he was gratified to be able to help her out of friendliness or out of something bigger and deeper?

Suddenly she realized that he knew why she had been out in the rain.

"Yes," she said, "I ran away from him."

He started at her swift intuition. He did not speak, but nodded quickly.

Again a pause, in which she saw him wondering, not for the first time, how she had ever come to put herself within Harvey's reach. She couldn't tell him why—not fully, at all events. She couldn't say, "I made him bring me out here so that I could be near you." And as long as there was no more than a serious concern for her welfare in the glance he gave her she would have to go on hiding the truth from him.

He surprised her with a question.

"Didn't you know he would try to make love to you?"

"I'm afraid I did. That's where I was dishonest—I didn't want him to, and I did not say so at the beginning. I haven't any excuse, and certainly no right to expect other people's sympathy——"

"He is many kinds of a brute. You wanted to get away from home, to see something of the world, and you seized your chance like a sensible woman, thinking you could keep him in order. It was something understandable that, wasn't it?"

She tried to believe that his sympathy sprang from a deep source. But, watching him, listening to him, she could find no awakening passion in him. He was stirred, yes. He was worried and perplexed by the problem of what she was to do next, a subject neither of them had yet broached, but he did not love her. He was offended by the thought that Harvey had forced himself on her to the extent of putting her into terror-stricken flight, but he was not furiously, personally angry about it. His comforting her was friendly and sincere, but it was in no wise the comforting of an outraged and indignant lover. Had he felt thus, she would have been in his arms many minutes ago. As it was, he sat opposite her and grappled in his quiet, intense way with the question of what should be done now.

She saw that she ought never to have come to him like this—and yet where else could she have gone? Misery routed the fresh forces of hope, and the dull ache of failure fell upon her again. Estelle la Rose still held captive the lover in him. The sense of kinship to him, which was always predominant in her heart when she was in his presence, meant nothing, because he was

unaware of any similar feeling in himself. Vain dreams tumbled and broke, and there was nothing left.

"What," he asked, "are we going to do now?"

How that "we" could have gladdened her!

"There is nothing we can do. I shall go back to England as soon as possible."

"It seems a pity. But there doesn't appear to be anything else for it, does there?"

Wasn't there even a shade of disappointment in his voice? Go back to England? A tightness came into her throat, and her eyes hurt with approaching tears. She drove them back with determination not to let him see how utterly unhappy she was.

"Poor Helen!" he said, which made it more difficult than ever.

"You see," he went on, "you can do anything with a man like Gerald Harvey except hope that he will be reasonable about a thing like this. He's vile. No other word fits him. No nice woman ever had anything to do with him. He could never believe that his love-making is distasteful. Even if you don't get on well with your people I think you'd be happier at home than living in the same house with him. You'd never feel safe—now."

Her mind seized his phrase, "no nice woman." It almost implied that if she went back to the Passionata and stayed there she would soon cease to be a "nice woman" in his view. She gave up being savage with her tears, and they came silently, welling from her eyes

and wetting her cold cheeks. She kept her face hidden from him. He was staring at the fire, his strong profile outlined against the wall with its dark burden of books.

"Why don't you marry Martin Fayre?" he asked unexpectedly. She caught her breath. He knew, then, how matters were with his friend, and probably believed she was treating him badly.

"I don't love him," she said. He was thinking that in Martin lay the solution of her problems.

"He cares a great deal for you, you know. Perhaps, if you reconsidered it, you might feel differently. Later on, as you got to know him better, you would probably become extremely fond of him. I don't think you could help it."

"Would you have me marry him first and love him afterwards?"

"It has happened, and worked successfully."

But she was only aware that if Fabian cared an atom about her he could never imagine her married to Martin Fayre or any other man. He was thinking about Martin, almost pleading for him. The irony of it was not lost on her, and it cut sharply, with a physical pain.

Then he realized her tears, and the next moment had risen and put his arm round her shoulders. His touch thrilled and troubled her. His very tenderness hurt her. Before her disillusionment she would have clung to him, her arms round his neck, and poured out her heart to him. But there was no caress in his hands, only friendliness.

"Don't cry," he said.

"I wish—I was dead."

He continued to reassure her, and talked gently to her, knowing, however, that there was little use in his words. It hurt him strangely, this grief. She had always appeared so self-reliant. This was not the girl with whom he had walked in the early morning, or waltzed at Pontenero's when she first appeared in Rapaccio. He had not thought about her from any particular point of view, but he had thought about her, and inevitably he had unconsciously formed an idea of her temperament. He wished she wouldn't cry. It was disturbing; it made him feel that he was not dealing with the situation as well as he might. She aroused his sympathy to an unusual degree, and yet, after all, this was but a passing phase of unhappiness in her life. In a few hours' time, by morning, even with the natural resilience of youth, she would begin to look with dawning interest toward the future.

He had a strong desire to give Gerald Harvey a damned good thrashing, and it surprised him somewhat, because he realized that it did not come from a merely chivalrous instinct, but from a very personal need to express a protective attitude where she was concerned. She was a friend; and at times had been a companion. The thought of Harvey's rapacity made him angrier every time he remembered it.

He became silent, watching her slow recovery from

the tears which had caught her unprepared. It was no good talking. You couldn't say anything that was really comforting at a time like this. He wished Martin Fayre were near to take a hand; it occurred to him to telephone to Andora and ask him to come. His car would get him to Rapaccio in twenty minutes. But she had shown no enthusiasm at all at the thought of marrying him. To embroil Martin in this affair, if it were not to lead to the granting of his heart's desire, would be to worry him more than ever. He admired her simplicity and honesty of mind, however, regarding Martin. She was in an awkward position, and many women would have seen in the rich young lord of Castello Andora an easy, comfortable, and reasonable, if slightly dishonest, way out of it.

Looking at her bowed head, her forlorn air, he realized that there was something in her that he did not understand; something big and vastly important, which, if he could grasp it, would explain a great deal of the mystery he divined rather than saw. She was not Harvey's kind; neither was she "modern" in the commonly accepted view of what that meant, nor yet the half-educated, ignorant, gullible sort of girl who would blindly accept a chance to go abroad with a man of Harvey's obvious type without considering the obligations it must entail. She was not a fool, she was not dishonest, and she was not insincere. And yet look at the mess she had run herself into. It

was all so contradictory. What was she really?

"I would almost believe," he said to himself, "that she's a woman in love!"

He did not pursue the thought further, but accepted with mingled relief and doubt her suggestion that she should return now to the Passionata.

"I'll escort you there," he said. "But Harvey——"

"I've given you enough trouble as it is. I shall be quite all right alone, really. I—I'm sure that my—er—agreeable employer has got over his mood by this time, and anyway Mrs. Anstruther will be home from her bridge quite soon if she isn't already there. Do you think—that my—my clothes are dry?"

She smiled ruefully. It all seemed so ridiculous, somehow, like one of those odd dreams—being out in that fantastic rain, and having to undress and dress again in a strange room. He didn't seem to think about it like that. He took everything as it came with the same delicious readiness to believe life capable of anything, particularly the mad and unexpected.

It hurt more and more to be with him.

He fetched her clothes, warm and dry from the kitchen, and went out again to find her a mackintosh and a pair of galoshes. She dressed quickly, and shuddered involuntarily when the torn shoulder of her frock reminded her of Harvey's mauling hands.

The firelight played with the marshalled books around the walls and the polished walnut sides of the writing-

desk. Fabian's room, and this the first and last time she would be in it. She absorbed all she could see that the picture might remain vivid in her memory, and when he opened the door and came with mackintoshes across his arm she sought his face, and forced the vision of it upon her weary mind.

"I'm quite ready," she said.

He helped her into a raincoat several sizes too big for her, and she pretended to be amused at the effect. She mastered the insistent pain of realization and simulated a confidence she did not feel. She wanted him to remember her as he had first known her, and not as the fugitive.

Sooner or later she would have to face Harvey again, and tell him that she was returning to England. She wondered vaguely what he would say, but did not care.

"You had better take my arm," suggested Fabian in the darkness of his porch. "It's not raining so hard, but the ground is liquid mud—the heaviness of the rain has churned it up."

She took his arm, and, although she was glad of its help, the fact that she had to be so close to him, her side touching his, was perhaps the most agonizing experience of that unpleasant night.

At the entrance to the short drive to the Passionata she said, "I shall be all right now. Please don't come any further. There's no need."

"But I'd rather——"

"No. I think, frankly, it would be unwise, if Gerald is about—and he will be. He'll be a bit angry, and it would make things a hundred times worse for me if he makes a scene when you are there. Good-bye—and thank you again for everything. Pepeto will bring back the coat and galoshes to-morrow morning. Good-bye."

He took her hand because it was thrust into his, and repeated her "good-bye." The next moment she was an indistinct figure in the obscurity of the night, and he was thinking about her remark that it would make things " a hundred times worse" if he were embroiled with Harvey. It was, of course, the only considerate attitude for her to adopt, but he could not escape the feeling that there had been something unusual in the tone of her voice.

But then she was still upset, and with reason. He liked the plucky way she had gone back to the Passionata. Admittedly the dangerous moments were in all likelihood passed, but seeing the man again would not be pleasant for her.

Queer girl—nice girl—unexpected, and yet remarkably human and normal and likeable. Pity she was going back to London.

He stepped up to his ankle in a puddle, and cursed it. A disturbed evening . . . what had he been thinking about when she had clamored at the shutters? Ah, yes. Estelle——

He frowned in the darkness, and took up the train of thought Helen had interrupted.

In the hall of the Passionata Harvey stood and regarded his secretary with an air of cynical amusement, from which, however, he could not keep a certain surprise. She was aware of this aspect, and did not at first understand it.

"Oh," he said. "You've come back, have you?"

"It looks like it." She tried to pass him and so escape to her room, but he barred the way, his hands clasped behind him, rocking back and forth heel to toe, toe to heel.

"How did you get back?"

"How? I walked."

"From Andora?"

"Andora? Whatever makes you think I went to Andora?"

"I suppose you found that mackintosh in the garden?"

Her mind leapt instantly to the explanation. She had forgotten his suspicions. He had expected her to go at once to Martin. And there had been a train to Andora she might have managed to catch.

"If you didn't go to Andora, where did you go?"

There was, after all, no reason why she shouldn't tell him.

"To the Silencia! To Knight! Good Lord, girl, what did he think?" Disturbed, he wetted his lips.

"I really don't know," she replied. "I didn't ask him. Why should he think anything? Except that I must be rather an owl to wander about the countryside in a thin frock in the pouring rain. I'm tired. I want to go to my own room——"

"Just a minute, little Helen. You mean to tell me he didn't ask what was the matter with you? If I know anything about your state when you dashed out of here, he did."

"He didn't have to ask," she said angrily. "He guessed."

"Oh? He guessed. . . ." Harvey spoke slowly, his small, intent eyes fixed on her face. "He guessed. . . ."

He showed no sign of allowing her to go. She wondered whether Mrs. Anstruther had returned, and how long she would have to stand arguing with him. She took off the mackintosh and laid it on a chair. She forgot he would see her frock, and that it was dry. A sudden change came over his face, and she knew that he had hit upon the whole revealing truth.

"I see!" he exclaimed, and brought his clenched hands to his sides. "It isn't Fayre. It's *Knight!*" His eyes were hot with fury.

"I don't know what you mean. Mr. Knight took pity on me and sheltered me. And I may as well tell you now that I'm going home as soon as I can get away. I can't stop here an hour longer than is absolutely necessary. Please let me pass!"

"So it is Knight . . ." he repeated, and laughed. "Knight! Oh, I see the whole game now! You were devilish cunning, weren't you? Telling me the tale—about being unhappy at home and wanting to see Italy. Why, the first day, when you came to lunch, you talked about Knight! And who suggested Rapaccio! God! To think——"

He stopped abruptly and then laughed again. The situation, completely taking her aback by its unexpectedness, was beyond her control at that moment. She flushed, and could not keep the pain out of her eyes. He saw it, of course. That was why he laughed.

"And he wasn't having any, eh? Sent you back to me? Jove, but it's funny! Funnier than ever! I thought it couldn't be more of a joke than it was, but now—— Gosh! First Estelle—and now you!"

The name reached her consciousness, and aroused her like a splash of cold water. Her lips straightened, became thin with the tenseness of her mind. Estelle? Where did Estelle come into it?

"Why," he was demanding rhetorically, "why do my women fall for the man? I wasn't so surprised at Estelle—all men are meat for her. Money and admiration. She had some of mine, plenty of mine—but you—you're not that kind. Not a golddigger. But you fell for him just the same. Still, he doesn't want you. He wants Estelle. He's welcome to her. But you—

well, I'm glad he doesn't want you. Not yet, anyway. Later on, perhaps——"

"What is all this nonsense about Estelle?" she asked him. Would he tell her more definitely what he was hinting at? He was boasting. Let him boast on.

"Nonsense? Damned if it was nonsense! She was my mistress for two years! But I knew what I was taking on. I wasn't the first. Not by three or four. Oh, I know that! But she was fascinating in her way. Two years. A long time. We kept it dark, too. Oh, I'm not a fool, little Helen. I know women. They cant't hurt me. You shan't! D'you hear? You shan't!"

She did not hear the crunch of carriage-wheels in the wet gravel of the drive outside until he swore at the mischance which brought his sister home at such a moment. She did not hear them, because her whole mind was focused on the unpleasant news that Estelle la Rose had been Harvey's mistress for two years.

It made the whole thing so infinitely worse. It struck at her love for Fabian. Made it so much more difficult to bear.

But what could she do? If Fabian loved Estelle he loved her. She could have been the mistress of every loose-living rake in Europe for all that it affected him —if he loved her.

And he did. All the evidence pointed to it and proved it. Harvey opened the front door.

"Lady Mastersen revoked three times in one rubber," announced Mrs. Anstruther triumphantly.

CHAPTER XVI

DESPAIR

Sleep came after fruitless wrestling against the chains with which circumstance had bound her. They bit deep and held her fast; the futility of struggling was constantly upon her. Spent, powerless, feeble almost beyond feeling, she wanted to forget everything. And because she could not she came near to and understood the desperation of the suicide.

She could do nothing. Prevented by Harvey and her own tormented heart, she could not even stay near Fabian and hope that he would somehow learn the truth about Estelle la Rose. And, if he did, what difference could it make to her if Estelle's fascination overcame his disillusion?

And there was still Harvey to reckon with. Although he had been in a fine state of mingled triumph and anger, she was fairly sure he had heard her announcement that she was returning to England. He had ignored it deliberately, however, neither taking her seriously nor expecting her to carry out any such intention.

Well, she would go.

It was, perhaps, significant that Martin Fayre's voice

should awaken her the next morning. Blazing sunshine was pouring into her room, and she lay for some moments on the border-line of sleeping and waking. Full consciousness came, and with it the discovery that Martin was outside in the garden carrying on a spirited conversation with Harvey, who, by the way Martin's voice was raised, was standing on the veranda outside his bedroom and looking down on the garden and his early visitor. Helen glanced at her watch. It was barely nine o'clock, but from that point of view it was not surprising that Martin should be here. He came and went unexpectedly, with regard neither for the hour nor the domestic habits of other people. It was, apparently, a matter of indifference to him whether Harvey had dressed and breakfasted or came in pyjamas, ruffled from his bed.

Then she realized that they were talking about her, and that because the servants knew no English there was no particular reason why circumspection need be observed.

"Well, if you knew she was only out walking," Martin said querulously, "why should you ring me up and ask to speak to her?"

"I tell you I didn't *know* where she had been till she came back. All I remarked over the 'phone last night was that she had disappeared without saying when or where she was going. And that's all I say this morning. What's eating you, Fayre?"

"Nothing's eating me! If you merely called me up to tell me that, why did you ask for her as if you were certain she was at the Castle—and why were you suspicious when I told you she wasn't? You're sure she came back? Where is she now?"

"I suppose she's still asleep, in her bed."

Martin mumbled something which she could not hear. She got out of bed, slipped into a dressing-gown, and went to the window. Both men were out of sight. So Harvey had telephoned to Martin, had he? He hadn't admitted that to her last night. No wonder Martin was over in Rapaccio so early, showing signs of active suspicion.

"I'm going to dress," said Harvey's voice.

"I'll have breakfast with you," Martin announced calmly, and she heard the snap of his cigarette-case, and then his footsteps as he strolled up and down the terrace.

She was aware of that same magnetic force which he exercised over her, that same quality of attraction she had felt on every occasion she had been with him. The mere sound of his voice revived responsive emotions in her own breast. It was always strange, vague, and yet understood. There seemed nothing mysterious about it really. The very fact that when she was outside of the immediate range of his physical personality she did not feel the force drawing her to him showed her just what it was.

She gained great comfort from his presence at the breakfast-table. She sat with her back to the wide, sun-filled windows, so that there should not be too strong a light on her face, which had not yet recovered from the ravages of last night. She made a pretence of eating, if only to reassure Martin, who watched her with ill-concealed anxiety the whole time. Mrs. Anstruther, who appeared to know nothing of the drama which was being played under her aristocratic nose, refought the bridge battles of the evening; an emotional affair to which no one paid any attention.

Harvey, always one of those men in whom the blood moved slowly before midday, was sunk in profound and enigmatical gloom. She had no notion of what he was feeling about things, and she cared less. Since she had nothing further to conceal from him she found it almost a relief not to have to bother about him. She did not even wonder how his pride was assimilating the indigestible fact that she had used him for her own ends as deliberately as ever he had used her predecessors. Her mind was still, her heart was dead. External as well as internal things were hazy, as if sensed through the heavy mists of sleep. Reality had lost its form in the dimming shadow of pain.

The sunshine made a difference, though. You couldn't feel utterly dead while that warm glory was in the world. A finger of it reached her neck, and the glow of its caress seemed to radiate through her whole body,

driving out a little of the weariness. Funny how physically exhausted you felt when the mind was tired!

Some time, she decided, she must make an effort toward getting her trunk packed. Although there was in her a need to get away from this place, wherein she had lost everything, there was side by side with it a great inertia. But that, she realized, would pass in a while.

But for Martin she would have negelected the breakfast she felt she could not eat, and gone out into the full sunshine outside.

That young man made no pretence of troubling about the gloominess of his unwilling host or Mrs. Anstruther's reason why she called three spades over Lady Mastersen's three hearts. He stared at Helen as long and as often as decency permitted, trying to decide what had happened last night. She was silent, pale, pathetically unlike her usual self. He thought of a child who has been punished for some trivial and unimportant sin, which in the light of the punishment has loomed large and sinister.

After breakfast he resorted to a simple stratagem, which, somewhat to his surprise, resulted in a complete success, unchallenged by Harvey, who for some reason or another no longer regarded him as a despoiler of the home.

"I tell you what, Helen. You can show me that [illegible]

in the town you were talking about—the one you couldn't place. You remember. . . ."

She didn't, but she nodded mechanically, and, glad to get away from the table and into the sun and open air, allowed Martin to lead her on to the terrace, and from the terrace into the lower garden.

Alone together, and out of sight from the villa, he faced her squarely.

"Now *shoot!*" he said.

"Shoot?"

"Americanism. Shoot—meaning speak! Talk! Tell the story!"

"Oh, there's nothing, Martin . . . anyway, I'd rather not. I don't feel like talking at all. I'm sick to death . . . everything's upside down, whirling. Cross-purposes, a muddle of people and thoughts and wants—and hates—— Life's too much for me, I'm afraid, and that's all there is to it. I set out to climb up it—to use it—to hold it. . . . And it has thrown me down—and I'm not sure that it hasn't trampled on me too."

"Harvey!" ejaculated Martin. "It's that devil Harvey. He has . . ."

Awakened by the fury and anguish of his voice, she realized what he was thinking and suspecting.

"No! He hasn't . . . it's not that, Martin——"

"Then what in heaven *has* happened?"

She saw that he had stepped out of his consideration for her, on which she had been unconsciously relying,

and the look on his face frightened her. The last mists cleared from her brain. This was no moment to lie down and let circumstances drive her where it would. She had got to think quickly and lucidly again, and fight off the tempting desire to obey the demand in Martin's eyes. He wanted her . . . loved her . . . wanted to marry her. . . .

"Helen!" he said. "This is where we get down to it. You're damned miserable. That swine has tried to make love to you. You ran away from him last night. He thought you were coming to me. Why didn't you come to me? You know you wanted to, don't you? You may have tried to come for all I know. He thought you had. He rang up convinced that you were with me. For God's sake, marry me, Helen, and make me the happiest man on this green earth!"

She turned her face from him. Oh, but it would be so easy just to let go and have his arms close round her! How safe she would be; how gloriously safe! Nothing could hurt her any more. She wouldn't have to go back to the littleness of things at home, to the tedium of some typist's desk in a dark office surrounded by the dreariness of sheer existence. How safe! How gloriously safe! And how dishonest!

"Oh, Martin, I can't!"

"You must! I love you!"

All the weight of his physical yearning, and its response in her, fell upon the moment. "You fool!" cried

her body. "You fool! Don't you realize what you're throwing away? Take him! Take him! He can give you everything . . . love, money, and security. What more do you want? Fabian? Fabian is out of it. Estelle has got him. He doesn't want you. Never did, and never will! Last night he patted your head and was sorry for you—and advised you wisely about life. Not a sign of his caring for you. Do you still think you love him? Why, he even advised you to marry some one else—this man who is trembling with love for you! Haven't you the sense or the courage of a mouse? Could you really, seriously, go back to that dull life at home, and throw aside passion and wealth and the beautiful things? Take your chance while you have it!"

She wrung her hands and pressed the back of her head against the stone wall supporting the terrace above. His eyes pursued her, urging and pleading.

"You must!" they said.

"Of course you must!" cried the thing in her she strove to put down.

Then, unexpectedly, the fire went out of Martin. His hands dropped, and he turned away a little, so that she no longer had to face him. He looked out across the sea, his shoulders eloquent of failure. She breathed a faint sigh of relief. While she had been summoning her courage to carry on the fight within herself he had decided the issue for her.

"I won't ask you for a reason," he said drily. "I

won't ask you melodramatically if there is some other man. You know your own heart best, if ever anyone did. You're damned honest, Helen. Particularly with yourself. That's what caught me in the beginning I think——"

He was silent, and she felt immeasureable pity for him. Had she the right, she demanded suddenly of her conscience, wilfully to deny him happiness? Was she really so honest?

"You're beautiful," he remarked, half to himself, still staring at the sea. "You're good. Never thought you were anything else. Rare in women, goodness—as I see it. Maybe I'm a fool. Romantic, inexperienced, and all that. I'm in love with a woman who can't love me. Of course I'm a fool. A fool."

"Oh, no!" She touched his flaccid hand, and felt the tendons draw and contract under her touch. "I've been a little rotten most of the time. Playing a game and scheming——"

"What do you mean?"

His glance flickered restlessly over her face. It was as though he had not the strength to gaze fully into her eyes.

"I've—oh, what's the use! It's finished now. I've hurt myself, and I've hurt you. I was so very clever—except when it was really necessary to be clever. I made you love me without wanting to—realizing almost at the beginning that you would unless I kept away from you.

But I didn't. I let you see me, let you be kind to me. It's all my fault. I was careless and selfish. I wasn't thinking about you. Only about myself and what I wanted."

"What did you want?"

She hesitated. She assured herself that she owed him at least a true explanation of things, although she saw that in reality she was obeying a sudden, urgent desire to make confession. There was so much she had repressed, so little she had been able to set free. The secret thoughts and feelings of the weeks which had brought her to this day surged and eddied, thrusting, and striving to break down the banks of silence, like a deep torrent of water leaping to escape its narrow confines.

She steadied herself with an effort. She would tell him quietly, quickly, about Fabian, and hope that before she went out of this colorful, sunlit world in which this lover of hers moved he would find comfort in hearing the truth, which would bring comfort to her in the telling.

"What did you want, Helen? I said I wouldn't ask you questions—but I can't help myself. You—all this business—matters too much. Snub me, for you have the right to."

"I haven't. Martin, listen. I came out here, with Harvey, as his secretary, knowing the appointment was a blind to ease the conventions. He brought Mrs. An-

struther to make it look better. But I knew what he wanted and deliberately encouraged him. Alternately playing up to him and stalling him off. I wanted, you see, to be out here, in Rapaccio, and through him to get to know——"

Looking over her shoulder toward the path from the upper terrace, he moved his hand abruptly, warningly.

"Harvey——" he murmured under his breath.

She broke off, startled, half relieved, half anxious; glad of the interruption at a difficult moment, and yet regretting the need to restrain the rising flood of confession.

Harvey strolled casually down the path in their direction, smiling. He had disturbed them.

"Meet me at the Tennis Club for tea——"said Martin, without looking at her, and pitching his voice so that it reached no further than her ears. "You will, won't you?"

It was no moment to refuse. Besides, she wanted to talk to him.

"If I can manage it."

"You will manage it."

Harvey joined them.

"Discussing time-tables?" he remarked.

"For what?" inquired Martin.

"Why, for Helen's imminent return to the land of her birth. Didn't she tell you she had decided, a trifle un-

necessarily to my mind, to go back to England—permanently?"

"She had not. Is this dreadful news true, Helen?" His tone was light, but his eyes were surprised and afraid.

"I fear it is. I'm going back to-night—by the usual train."

Martin said nothing. Perhaps he could not trust himself to comment. It was clear that he guessed that she was going because Harvey had come out into the open with an ultimatum—which, with him, could be only of one kind.

He escaped with marked haste a few minutes later. Helen saw the message in his eyes that whatever happened she must keep the rendezvous at tea time. She nodded slightly, and watched him out of sight down the drive, his long legs hurrying. Once he turned and looked back at her.

"Well," said Harvey. "What's the programme for to-day? You've forgiven me, of course? I was an idiot to behave like that. You can't have Fabian, you don't appear to want Martin, so you may as well make up your mind to have me."

"Thank you, no."

"I'll behave. I'll eat out of your hand." He was smiling all the time. She did not answer him, but went into the villa with his laugh in her ears. He had taken

up the chase again, and his self-satisfaction had in consequence returned with typical elasticity.

She set her mouth, stuck to her intention, and packed her trunk and suit-case before lunch. She had got to get back to England, and forget—if she could—that there had ever been a Fabian Knight into whose eyes she had looked and vision therein beheld.

She would see Martin again that afternoon, and, in a cooler, saner frame of mind, tell him the whole story. It was only fair. Thereafter—finish!

At half-past three in the afternoon, evading observation, she went down into the town by the short cut and, cashing sufficient of her letter of credit, bought a second-class ticket to Victoria. No more first-class for her. Her money must be eked out until she found a job. Queer how dull the pain seemed now that she was moving about, employing her mind with trivialities! She'd get over it. She must!

At 4.15 she met Martin at the club-house.

"Let's walk up the hill a bit, under the olives," he said, without further greeting. "I've got some tea for us." He produced a small basket and a thermos flask. Even at this point, when she knew he must be utterly miserable, he remained the charming person who thought about her small comforts.

Side by side they followed a rising path, until the tennis-courts were below them, dotted with energetic white figures. The twang of ball on racquet and the

voices of the players floated up in the still afternoon air. The light was golden, with a low sun above the cliffs of the bay's western arm. The grey-green of the olive-trees was mellower, less harsh than in earlier sunlight, and their twisted trunks threw long shadows over grass and terrace wall.

Martin made no effort to speak, and Helen allowed the tranquillity of the hour to absorb her. There was a greater restfulness in her now than she had known for days. She felt that she had been tossed willy-nilly through a storm into sudden calm. The stillness was no indefinite absence of movement, but possessed a physical reality of its own.

This was the last time she would see the sun setting on Rapaccio; the last time she would walk in its wild-olive groves.

"Will this do?" asked Martin at length, and she nodded. He established her on a flat stone where a tree formed a natural chair-back, sat down cross-legged at her side, and unpacked the picnic basket. She watched him curiously. He was deep in thought, and seemed to have reached beyond the turmoil which had marked the day's beginning for him; had come, as she had come, into a period of quietude. The cups clinked musically in the saucers. He began to unwrap small parcels.

She said softly, "You make me ashamed, Martin. You think only of making things easy for me——"

"I know you would do the same for me if you could. Tell me, are you really going off to-night—or were you pulling Harvey's leg for reasons of your own?"

"That necessity has passed," she said shortly. "Yes—I am going. I bought the ticket an hour ago. To-night there's a through carriage. I don't have to change at Ventimiglia. Even the railway company wants to convince me."

"Perhaps it is as well, but——"

"It is the only thing to do—to clear cut. From every one's point of view it is best."

"From your own too?"

"From my own too."

He arranged sandwiches on a cardboard plate.

"Shall we eat now—or talk—or both?"

"Both—although I'm not hungry."

"Better try. Devil of a journey."

The reminder brought it home to her. She had forced him to accept her going, but to hear him talk about it emphasized the futility of the tragedy which lay aching in her heart.

She saw that he would no longer prompt her to confession. If she chose to continue the interrupted story it would be of her own wish as far as he was concerned.

"I was telling you," she began, with no awkwardness, "about my coming out as Harvey's secretary——"

"Yes." He did not look at her, but down over the edge of the terrace into the darkening valley.

She paused.

"It was because of Fabian Knight. . . ."

He started, surprised and wondering.

"Fabian?"

"It was like this. I saw him, about a month ago, in London, in a *café*. It was just before his play finished. He was with Estelle la Rose. I saw him—and fell in love with him——"

He did not look at her, and gave no further sign that he was startled. He carefully poured tea from the thermos into the teacups. They steamed fragrantly.

"I was able," she went on, "to realize that in the ordinary way I should never get to know him; and that if I wanted to—and heaven knows I did—I should have to work at it pretty hard. The day after I had arranged to have lunch with Gerald Harvey—and it seemed that Fate had been in it from the beginning. For he had met Fabian out here last year, and knew him slightly. Fabian had a villa here, and came out every winter. Harvey was going abroad soon. Italy again, probably. . . . He was a friend of my father. He was attracted by me. Then he decided to rent a villa in Rapaccio and take me out as his secretary. I worked it—worked him—deliberately——"

"I see," said Martin slowly. "I see. You came out and met Fabian. I think I helped to introduce you? And what happened?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You can see what has happened. He likes me as an occasional person to talk to—but he is further from falling in love with me than this tree."

"Because of Estelle?"

"Because of just that, or because I have no attraction for him."

He was silent, and she could feel that he was moved by some thought hidden from her.

"You see now, don't you," she added, "how I have planned and used people? And how I have failed at the end, and why I must go away? I can't stay here, near him, and watch him being—being——"

"Fascinated into a state of blind idiocy by that atrocious woman? I see that clearly enough. But, Helen . . . You care for him, still—just as much?"

She inclined her head in assent. He remained thoughtful for a moment. She took a thin sandwich; it gave her something to do in an awkward pause.

"You know," he said abruptly, "you need not go for fear of being near him—and Estelle."

"But, Martin——"

"For the adequate reason that he is going away himself—leaving Rapaccio."

"Going!"

"Yes. I had lunch with him. I think he wanted to justify himself—justify a somewhat melodramatic solution of his difficulty. Estelle is not free to marry him.

There's a husband somewhere in the distant background. The present situation here, he said, is impossible. He seems to be desperately in love with her, and she with him. He is taking her to Paris——"

"Oh!" said Helen under her breath, staring into the low sun, which seemed to sway in her vision.

"It struck me that she's got him hynotized—at any rate, he is convinced that neither he nor she will be happy unless they get away somewhere where they can be together. I think they'll go soon. He was very restless and eager for action. Estelle has played him cleverly. She looks to him for everything, he says. Apparently she has looked to him to take her away—to protect her from the cruel hands of the world, and so on. She has worked on his romantic spirit. He is romantic, you know. So far he has confined himself to the harmless outlet of his writing. It seems to me, too, that when a man begins living with his own imaginings there's trouble. At any rate, with a chap like Fabian Knight. I don't suppose he thought the thing out at all. She has got her pretty claws into his heart, and the sensation has clouded his head, poor devil."

She knew he was talking on at random, that she might have time to adjust herself.

"We can't let him do this!" she interrupted him.

"We can't very well stop him. He's not the kind of man to take by the arm and say, 'Now, now, my dear fellow! What's all this about? Have a drink and listen

to me a minute.' I assure you that if ever a woman had control of a man's destiny Estelle has control of Fabian's now."

Helen sat silent. This news had a queer effect. The thought of Fabian definitely and publicly taking Estelle for his mistress was nauseating, but it was also stimulating. She felt that something ought to be done, and, unlike Martin, that it could be done. In the midst of a weary retreat she had suddenly been called to turn and fight.

She was aware of Martin's commiserating eyes.

"This doesn't help you," he said gently, "but you would have had to know sooner or later, and I thought it better you should hear it from me than from some one who might have put it—er—crudely—not knowing how things were. Besides, if you want to stay out here——"

"I couldn't. There's Harvey for one reason—and the associations of the place for another." She did not add that there was also himself, whom she knew it was best to leave.

Then she forgot, almost, that he was by her side, as the vision of Fabian came to her. Fabian whom she had lost into the hands of Estelle La Rose. She knew him so well. She saw that the affair had been made of tremendous spiritual importance to him, and that in the chivalrous knight-errant the student and critic of humanity had been lost. The bright mist of his romantic

attitude, conjured into being by Estelle, obscured his normal view. He couldn't see the prosaic structure of the situation. He could not, at the moment, see that he was merely running off to Paris with an actress whose chief need and occupation was the seduction of men.

At the moment. Therein lay the tragedy. How long would he remain blind? Sooner or later he would emerge from the dark—from her capricious arms—and find the light inconceivably painful.

"You said they would go soon. . . . How soon?"

"He asked me to attend to one or two matters he would not have time to deal with himself, and when I left him an hour ago he was packing a suit-case. His other luggage was to be sent after him when he arrived wherever he was going."

She shivered.

"To-day?"

"It looks like it."

Forgotten by her, he watched her mobile face as she thrashed out the issues. Her mind, with which she was more honest than any woman he had known, was crystal clear to him. He needed no intuition, no knowledge of psychology, to tell him what thoughts hurried therein. He had never admired her as he did during those few minutes on the sunlit hillside, when he saw also that for himself there was no place and no hope.

She turned to him suddenly and smiled. The sweetness of her mouth made him tremble.

"Dear Martin——"

That was all she said.

He walked up the hill-road with her for the last time, and kissed her hand at the villa gates. Her white figure glimmered in the dusk, and vanished. He turned and strode up into the hills, his head thrust forward and his eyes on the road.

He walked for six hours without halting, and by the time he came again to Rapaccio and the places where other men were the train for France and the North had left.

He met Harvey returning from the station. The man was in a very bad temper.

"She's gone," he announced abruptly. "Bloody fools, women!"

Martin looked at him, and then, with characteristic impulse, swung his fist and hit him violently on the jaw. Eyeing him as he sat collapsed in the road, a dazed and defeated and somewhat ridiculous Harvey, he decided that he felt a great deal better.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND CUP

HELEN caught a fleeting glimpse of Fabian farther up the platform as she climbed into the second-class carriage, and thereby had all doubts set at rest. He was on the train, and of a surety Estelle was with him. They would be in the first-class section, probably two coaches away. She found a compartment with only two other travellers in it, an Italian artillery sergeant and a woman in black, with tired eyes. The soldier fixed her with a gallant and unremitting stare, to which, however, she became oblivious. What was she going to do?

It was easy to decide that Fabian must be prevented from taking this fantastic step. But how? She did not know; and when she began wondering if she were really worrying about his reputation and his ultimate peace of mind she seemed to lose all grip on a coherent sequence of thought. "Be honest and face the truth," said the censor of her conscience. "You're still trying to win."

She had to admit it, but at the same time she insisted that she could conceive nothing more harmful to Fabian than the possession of Estelle as a mistress. She could

not forget Gerald Harvey's boast that he had lived with her for two years. A woman who could stand him as long as that! Martin had not attempted to dissuade Fabian. He had thought it impossible. Probably it was—and would be. What was she going to say to him, providing she could talk to him alone some time before Paris? How would she approach the subject so intimate? The moment must bring its inspiration, she decided.

During the next hour she was alone in the compartment while the soldier and the woman in black were in the dining-car. She did not feel like dinner herself, apart from the risk of meeting Fabian and Estelle together, which she wanted if possible to avoid.

Looking back on that period of anxiety, she wondered afterward why she did not shrink from the task she was contemplating. There must have been a new strength, a new confidence in her, awakened by the sudden movement of affairs. The stagnation of defeat which had for a time atrophied her usual energy of thought and action had passed. In short, there was something, vague though it was, to be done.

In response to a sudden decision that after all it could not make a great difference if she did happen upon the two of them together, she obeyed the summons of the *deuxième service* bell, and made her way to the dining-car, a journey which necessitated her passing through the corridor of the *wagon-lit* coach in

which she suspected Fabian and Estelle were travelling.

Some of the doors were open, others closed. She went past them, swaying unsteadily with the rocking of the train, her heart beating quickly with sheer nervousness; but she saw nothing of the eloping couple. She was both relieved and disappointed.

Then, as she reached the concertina-like passage between the last *wagon-lit* and the restaurant-car, Estelle la Rose, in a grey coat and skirt and small red hat, came through it. Helen made room for her to pass, which she did without recognizing Gerald Harvey's secretary. She continued along the corridor and went into a compartment door half-way down. Helen took a deep breath, and, about to enter the restaurant-car, came face to face with Fabian.

"Hullo!" he said, with slight awkwardness. "You're going home, then?"

"Yes." She stood aside to allow several *deuxième service* people to pass ahead of her. For a moment she was close to, almost touching him. He looked pale, and a little anxious.

"I want to talk to you," she said quickly. "I'm going in to dinner now. Afterward——"

He frowned.

"Of course. But—er—I'm not alone. I——"

"Come along to the dining-car in three-quarters of an hour's time. I'll wait for you. They will have finished eating."

He was undecided, and for a moment her heart failed her. Suppose he said he was sorry, but couldn't manage it? He didn't, however. She knew that he thought she wanted to pour out her troubles to him, and, with a lack of eagerness she thoroughly understood and forgave, he agreed. Poor man!

She gave him a grateful smile, and he followed Estelle.

She ate little dinner. The minutes passed slowly. The waiters, balancing dishes miraculously, seemed to take a year to serve each course. She ordered coffee, and sat over it after the *débris* of the meal had been cleared away. Would he come? Would Estelle let him? What excuse would he give to leave her? She imagined a conversation between them—the petulance of Estelle's mouth, and Fabian's apologetic but determined air. Probably he would tell the truth—or what he thought was the truth; that Miss Palmer was on the train, leaving her job with Harvey under unpleasant circumstances, and wanted to unburden herself. The actress would want to know why, precisely, Miss Palmer should think he wanted to hear her silly confessions, for it did not seem likely that he had told Estelle about the scene in the library last night, when he had offered comfort, advice, and a dressing-gown to a rain-soaked young woman.

Remembering that hour, its futility returned to her. An accident, almost a manifestation of a benign fate,

it might have brought her to the threshold of Paradise; but it had not. Even while she had been with him, while he had his arm round her shoulders, his mind had held the prospect of this flight with Estelle. An ironic situation!

His tall figure entered the restaurant, and he came toward her. There were two other late diners, but at tables some distance down the coach. He sat down.

"You look tired," he said.

"I am, a bit. I'm glad you came."

His expression seemed to suggest that he had said he would come, which was all there was to it. She was sure Estelle had objected, and a tiny glow of triumph warmed her for a moment. She suspected he was not altogether comfortable about the actress, whose temperament was of a kind which exacted more naturally than it gave.

There was a moment's silence.

"Have you time for coffee?" she asked.

"I'll order some. Do you mind if I smoke a cigar?" He beckoned the waiter.

"I like the smell of a cigar."

"Estelle hates it," he remarked, before he realized what he was saying. He was on edge. He flushed, and hid it in lighting the cigar.

"It's all right," she said softly. "I know."

"Know? What?"

"About Estelle——"

"Oh! The news travels ahead of us?"

"I'm sorry. I—well, you can't expect it not to, can you? Martin told me."

He frowned and poured out his coffee. She hastened to justify his friend. She had not realized that Martin had betrayed confidence, but of course that was what he had done.

"I got it out of him. In fact, I guessed," she lied.

His face cleared a little.

"But we aren't here to talk about me, are we?"

She nodded without looking at him.

"We are." She paused, frightened at her presumption. "I know I'm interfering—and that nobody has the right to do—in a thing like this—which is——"

"Particularly personal and intimate. Go on."

She regarded him pitifully. His face was a polite mask, hiding his anger.

"Don't look like that!" she said. "Oh, I'm a fool. I've committed myself, and you'll hate me for the rest of your life—or despise me, which is worse. But, Fabian, you can't be—can't be—happy with her. You know, in your heart, that it's true. She's miles away from you in sympathy, in mind, in everything. She's —she's little more than a—a——"

"Yes?" His voice was cold.

"This is wretched—talking about her behind her back, and it's more difficult than you know. I was going to say 'prostitute.' I meant more in her character

than her life. She draws men to her for her own sake —not for theirs. You aren't the first—you know that——"

"I know that."

"And you won't be the last."

"I shall," he said, with utter conviction.

What had Martin said about the romantic attitude?

She shook her head. Fear had left her. She had passed for ever out of this man's regard, and, as long as he listened patiently, she would fight on—for his sake.

"She lived with Gerald Harvey for two years."

"Harvey!"

His face was alive now, and with horror. She was immeasurably sorry for him. She saw the crumbling of his tolerance, an understanding born of the mind rather than the emotions. In falling in love with Estelle he had dismissed her former lovers with the comparative ease their vagueness made possible. But to be confronted with Harvey as one of them awakened physical and æsthetic disgust.

"This is true?" His voice was uneven.

"I'm sure it is." What a beast she felt to have to hurt him! "You see, it wasn't only what he said when he was angry, when he boasted, but the first day I met him—properly—he smiled in a queer way when I mentioned Estelle, and then afterwards—I think it was at Pontenero's that night we danced, when Estelle first

appeared—his manner suggested that he had once known her very well indeed—and, if he had, why did they have nothing to do with each other at all in Rapaccio? I don't believe they ever spoke to one another. It was to both their interests to ignore each other. The past might have stuck up its head awkwardly."

"Awkwardly?"

"Well—he was concerned with me, and she with you——"

He was silent, stirring his coffee, and she marvelled at his control. She had drawn a sordid picture for his contemplation, a picture which showed the insecurity—almost the rottenness—of the building in which he proposed to live, and all he did was to say nothing and break up a lump of sugar at the bottom of a cup as though it were a matter worthy of his whole attention.

"Remarkably unpleasant," he said presently, in reflective tones. "I wonder why I'm not thinking of madness or suicide or the futility of life. But I'm not. I ought to be telling you that you're vile, Helen. That you have deliberately gone out of your way to smash my happiness. There's a good *cliché* for my state hitherto—'a fool's Paradise.' You've jolted me out of it, and I can feel no particular pain received in the process. I wonder why?"

"Perhaps in your secret heart you have been—well, doubtful for some time."

"Perhaps. But——"

"If she is like that, why have I—why did I fall in love with her?" She finished his sentence.

"Let's say you fell in love with the idea of her she presented to you. She made herself romantic—and, after all, she has a marvellous body and the art of using it."

"You're peculiarly observant."

"Women have to be. It's their job."

"In the meantime she's sitting in that *wagon-lit* waiting for me. What the devil am I to do?" He laughed without amusement.

She shook her head, her usually practical mind exhausted, perhaps, by the strain of the last few minutes. Relief at the way he had taken the thing occupied her senses. He did not even hate her. It was so obvious now that he had been driving himself into action he subconsciously distrusted.

Suddenly he faced her.

"Where do you come in?" he demanded. "Don't think I do not realize how difficult this has been for you. I'm not sure, but I've a shrewd suspicion you have done something for me which will make me grateful to you in no ordinary sense. It seems, too, that you've been astonishingly courageous. Few people would have dared to do it."

He paused, and lifted his coffee. Unconsciously she did likewise, and for a brief moment their eyes met across the table over the edges of their cups in the same

way that they had met a few weeks ago in the Café Corona. But this time there was a difference so subtle and yet so vastly important that it almost destroyed the aspect of coincidence.

He read in her eyes that vague, unphysical, perhaps spiritual, message which the first time she had read in his. She experienced for a moment a complete submergence of soul. It felt as though she were being drawn into the pupils of his eyes. She did not resist. They came closer, increased in size with startling rapidity, and engulfed her.

"My God!" he said under his breath, and dropped the cup. "What's happened?"

She knew, but she did not answer. It was beyond words. She put down her cup slowly while he stared at her. Abruptly he reached out and caught her hands.

"Don't you realize?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What have you got to say——"

"Nothing. What is there to say? I knew so long ago. Days, weeks—a month ago. My dear, dear beloved——"

"I've got to think," he murmured.

She let him. For herself there was no need. Incredible happiness surged upward from the depths of her being and flowed through her, sweeping away doubt and fear and darkness. Light glowed everywhere. He still held her hands, fiercely, because he dared not let

this thing, which escaped him in thought, slip away in flesh.

"What about—Estelle?" she asked, after a period of minutes. He looked startled and replied simply:

"I'd forgotten her. I must tell her. I'd better go——"

"There's no need——"

He looked over his shoulder, following her glance. Estelle was standing at the door, twenty feet away, and watching them. The restaurant-car was deserted save for the three of them. Fabian rose to his feet as Estelle bore down, sailed down almost.

"Oh, so this is where you've been?" she said, and the hectoring tone was ill-disguised. "Has he gazed sufficiently into your eyes, Miss Palmer? I'm so glad. Perhaps you can spare him, now?"

The vulgarity of it screamed aloud. Helen knew that the woman must have guessed what had been happening. She would not have needed to watch them long. So for a moment she was aware of acute discomfort in a situation which had created itself without the slightest warning. But she was uncomfortable on Fabian's account more than on her own. What was he going to say? What was there to say, except, baldly, "I've finished with you. I've been a fool—good-bye."

Estelle handled the situation badly. She flung away her one chance of emerging with any triumph by remarking caustically:

"Well, my dear, you've made the mistake of your life. You've barked up the wrong tree. He's mine. What a hope you've got!"

"Be quiet!" said Fabian.

"*I*—be quiet! I like that!" She put her hands on her hips, a traditional gesture which stamped her even more effectively than her words. Behind Fabian's steady expression was bitter anger with himself. He thought of the things he had said to her, the promises he had made, and hated himself.

"I've made a mistake, Estelle. You won't forgive me any more easily than I shall forgive myself, and I shouldn't dream of asking you to."

"You mean you're trying to drop *me!*" Her mingled disbelief and amusement were nicely blended. "You poor fool!"

He moved his head, and, seeking Helen's eyes, found pity in them.

"You come back to the carriage with me," startled Estelle harshly, "and I'll explain what I mean——"

She turned on her heel and stalked, for all the world as if from a stage, down the car and out of it, trailing after her utter and complete conviction that Fabian would follow her. But he did not move.

"My heavens!" he said, and, seeing the laughter in Helen's face, laughed aloud. "What a scene!"

"But you did your best. You know, I'm honestly sorry for her. She seemed—so—so unreal."

"That, my child, is exactly what she is, I'm afraid. But what precisely are we going to do? This train——"

"Is drawing into Ventimiglia," replied Helen, and met his eyes.

"Why not?" he exclaimed, and caught her to him.

"Why not?"

He released her, and, dragging a passport and a ticket from his pockets, he dived into the kitchen at the end of the car.

"Give these to the lady in the third compartment in the next coach—but not before the train starts!" he instructed a waiter he found there.

They were on the platform before the train stopped, excited like children at a game, and running down the train to the second-class coaches.

They found her hand-luggage, which to the vast surprise of the gallant artilleryman, they pulled out of the train as if the devil was after them.

"What about your things?" asked Helen.

"Let 'em go. What's a bag of clothes?" he demanded, and hurried her out of the station.

"I know an Italian poet who lives at Ospedaletti. We'll take a car. He'll put us up——"

He was like a man who has suddenly discovered eternal youth. He flung himself upon a chauffeur in the *piazza* with promises and threats.

"Ospedaletti! Si, signore! Ecco—un' bell' macchina!"

Helen found herself in the *tonneau* with Fabian's supporting arm about her shoulders. She was breathless and a little bewildered. The dream, so long and slowly dreamt, was scurrying into reality.

The night air battered her face, the strength of his arm thrilled her.

"With luck we shall be married inside three days," he shouted in her ear above the roar of the *bell' macchina's* thoroughly Italian exhaust.

She put her cheek against his shoulder. The sea, blue and silver under the moon, came almost to the twisting road. What a mad, wild, delicious world it was!

THE END